

Aleš Březina / Ivana Rentsch (eds.)

Bedřich Smetana and European Opera



Königshausen & Neumann

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Introduction

Bedřich Smetana followed artistic and political events closely, which had immediate consequences on his professional life. In 1856, with no financial prospects on the horizon in Prague, he moved to Sweden, but he continued to take part in political events in Bohemia. After the October Diploma was issued in 1860, he remarked to Anna Kolářová, “There is political life in your country again, as I read in Bohemia.”¹ While no nationalistic statements of any kind have survived from the 1850s, Smetana took a resolute stance in favor of the Czechs from 1860 onwards.² At this point, Smetana, who had been socialized in a wealthy middle-class environment and was therefore naturally a German speaker, made a highly symbolic decision: from then on, he wanted to write diaries and letters in Czech, which he spoke only imperfectly at the time. Shortly afterwards, in May 1861, Smetana returned to Prague without any concrete prospects for a professional position, vaguely hoping to win a Czech-language opera competition, which had been announced by Count Jan Nepomuk Harrach. Even more, he hoped to become the music director for the planned Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater).³ Smetana’s support for Czech interests was obvious, as revealed by a German-language letter to his mother concerning his concert tour through Scandinavia, Germany, and the Netherlands in the spring of 1862:

Don’t forget to send me newspaper articles as well. Thank you for the two that have already been sent. They have pleased me, despite the malicious remarks of Bohemia. – The people here [in Gothenburg], as I predicted, take sides with the Czechs and find their endeavors quite natural; indeed,

- 1 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Anna Kolářová, December 26, 1860, Gothenburg, in Bedřich Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1, eds. Olga Mojžíšová, et al. (Prague: Národní muzeum, 2020), 233: “Bei Euch ist wieder politisches Leben, wie ich in der Bohemia lese.”
- 2 Marek Nekula and Lucie Rychnovská, “Jazyk Smetanových dopisů v dobovém kontextu,” in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1, *28–*73: *44.
- 3 Ibid., *41–*59.

they go further in their views about independence than we can ever imagine.⁴

Although Smetana's political commitment was evident from the early 1860s, it seems difficult to determine the concrete effects on his compositional work. Of course, historical circumstances played a significant role, but Smetana orientated himself and Prague's musical life toward European standards. He operated in an international aesthetic framework. To examine Smetana's operas, the Italian, German, and French repertoire which Smetana was well acquainted with as a conductor⁵ and his knowledge of Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, and Hector Berlioz come into focus. His works evolved within the tension between Czech partisanship and the desire for European validity.

Probably the greatest challenge in analyzing Smetana's operas is their reception. The view is obscured by the political appropriation of the composer and his work, which varies depending on the historical conditions before 1918, after the Munich Agreement in 1938, or after the communist takeover in 1948, but is nevertheless remarkably consistent. Smetana did not live to see his apotheosis as *the* Czech national composer. After suffering the usual amount of criticism as a composer and, from 1866 until his deafness in 1874, as conductor at the Prozatímní divadlo, it was not until shortly after his death in 1884 that he became seen as a model Czech national composer, which carries repercussions to this day. That this occurred posthumously is due not only to the fact that the deceased rather than the living are glorified, but also to institutional circumstances.

In 1883, a few months before Smetana's death, Otakar Hostinský, who was mainly responsible for the Smetana apotheosis, was appointed the first professor of aesthetics at the newly established Czech-language branch of the Prague Charles University. This singular position made the musicologist, music critic, and cultural politician the definitive authority on Czech musical life. Hostinský's aesthetic viewpoint, which he outlined in 1869 as a twenty-two-year-old doctoral student under the title "Umění a národnost" ("Art and Nationality") in *Dalibor*⁶ and underpinned in the following years with more

4 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Bettina Smetanová, March 24, 1862, Gothenburg, in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1, 360: "Vergesse nicht mir auch Zeitungsartikel herzusenden. Für die zwei schon geschickten danke ich, sie haben mich, trotz der boshaften Bemerkungen der Bohemia erfreut. – Die Leute hier [in Göteborg] nehmen, wie ich es vorausgesagt habe, durchaus Partei für die Čechen, und finden deren Bestrebungen ganz natürlich, ja sie gehen noch weiter in ihren Anschauungen von Unabhängigkeit, als wir je daran denken können."

5 For the repertory at the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater) see Václav Štěpán and Markéta Trávníčková, *Prozatímní divadlo. 1862–1883*, 2 vol. (Prague: Academia, 2006).

6 Otakar Hostinský, "Umění a národnost," *Dalibor* 8 (1869): 1–2, 10–11, 17–18.

monographs and articles, was given unrivalled scientific authority thanks to his academic position.

Hostinský's elevation of Smetana was by no means "just" about music. The fact that a Czech composer had to serve the Czech cause first and foremost is a recurring theme in Hostinský's writings. Hostinský saw this claim realized by Smetana like no other:

Much more than these compositions, we were attracted by Smetana's personality. He was a great artist who knew what he wanted, who had a clear program and a great goal. On the one hand, his whole being was rooted in the national Czech element, so that Czechness was a matter of course for him, and on the other hand, as a true son of his time, he devoted himself to the decisive progress of art. At the same time, however, he raised himself high above his surroundings by his firm, unbreakable belief that these two efforts were not mutually exclusive, but on the contrary were compatible, complementary and mutually reinforcing. Such principles seemed to many at the time to be foolish ravings [...]. *Smetana reconciled in one stroke the supposed conflicts between the national idea and the striving for progress and modernity, which the common opinions, prejudices and traditions of the time had brought to us*—he removed the heavy stone that had been suffocating us from our hearts, and so we gained irreversible confidence in the future of Czech art. We became self-confident; we began to feel as if we had been reborn, redeemed.⁷

Significantly, these words honored a composer whose personality was not only inextricably intertwined with his works, but whose significance even exceeded them. Hostinský's speech, delivered in 1894 on the occasion of the unveiling of a bust of Smetana in the Národní divadlo (National Theater), portrays a messianic figure whose religious exaltation corresponds to the

7 Hostinský, "Řeč při odhalení Smetanova poprsí v Národním divadle (Dne 31. března 1894)," in Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu* (Prague: Jan Laichter, 1901), 455–461: 459 (emphasis in original): "Mnohem více ještě než tyto skladby, poutala nás Smetanova osobnost. Byl to velký umělec, jenž věděl, co chce, jenž měl jasný program a velký cíl. Jednak celou svou bytostí zakotven byl v národním živlu českém tak, že českost byla mu věcí samozřejmou, jednak jako pravý syn doby své zasvětil se rozhodnému pokroku v umění. Avšak on zároveň vysoko povzněl se nad tehdejší okolí své pevnou, nezlomnou vírou, že tyto dvě snahy nikterak se nevylučují, nýbrž naopak snášejí, doplňují a navzájem i posilňují. Podobné zásady tenkrát mnohým zdály se býti pošetilým blouzněním [...]. *Smetana smířil jedním rázem domnělé ony spory mezi myšlenkou národní a snahou po pokroku a modernosti, které do nás vnášely běžné tehdy názory, předsudky a tradice* – on snál s našich srdcí těžký kámen, který nás dusil, a tak nabyli jsme nezvratné důvěry v budoucnost českého umění, stali jsme se sebevědomými, počali jsme cítiti se jako znovuzrození, vykoupení."

stylization of the Czech theater as a “temple” (figure 1).⁸ As the metaphor makes unmistakably clear, the endeavor to create a Czech national music was a sacred cause. According to Hostinský, Smetana’s mission was not to consolidate his “famous name,” but instead to raise “the artistic level of the entire nation.”⁹ Hostinský continued to develop his interpretation of Smetana as a selfless hero. As he decreed with the programmatic title of his monograph on Smetana published in 1901, even at the turn of the 20th century the composer’s entire career had been a continuous “*fight for modern Czech music*.”¹⁰

The basis of Hostinský’s enthusiasm for Smetana was the largely shared view that art is politically connoted, as demonstrated by the young Hostinský’s article “Wagnerianism and Czech National Opera” (“Wagnerianismus a česká národní opera”) published in *Hudební listy* in 1870.¹¹ With this sensational article, he waded into the heated debate about the nature of Czech art that had been taking place in the increasingly politicized artists’ association Umělecká beseda.¹² As the foundation stone for the Národní divadlo was laid in 1868, the nature of an adequate tradition for Czech opera was debated. In his self-confident article, Hostinský argued for Czech music drama in the spirit of Wagner. Hostinský was of course aware that the proposition of taking Wagner as a model for Czech national opera would provoke massive resistance because of Wagner’s declared Germanness. He anticipated this criticism and turned it into a positive force: according to Hostinský, Wagner’s music dramas were exemplary for “purely Czech national operas [...] *precisely because*” they were “purely, through and through German.”¹³ In this sophisticated argument, the relationship between music and

8 Ibid., 456: “chrám.” For the “temple” metaphor see Bedřich Smetana, “Veřejný život hudební v Praze III,” (*Národní listy*, no. 197 [June 22, 1864], reprinted in Bedřich Smetana, *Články a referáty: 1862–1865*, ed. Jan Reisser (Prague: Unie, 1920), 15: “A vskutku jest velmi na čase, že se konečně zase jednou pomýšlí na to, vystavěti našemu umění důstojný chrám.” (“And it is indeed very timely that a worthy temple to our art should finally be thought of once again.”) See also the speech of Karel Sladkovský at the laying of the foundation stone of the Národní divadlo (May 16, 1868) in František Adolf Šubert, *Národní divadlo v Praze. Dějiny jeho i stavba dokončená*, 2nd ed. (Prague: Družstvo Národního divadla, [1883]), 181: “jest základ důstojného chrámu národního našeho umění [...]” (“is the foundation of a worthy temple of our national art [...].”)

9 Hostinský, “Řeč při odhalení Smetanova poprsí v Národním divadle,” 459–460: “Ne sobě samému zabezpečiti slavné jméno, nýbrž uměleckou úroveň celého národa povznést [...]”

10 Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu*.

11 Hostinský, “Wagnerianismus a česká národní opera (*Hudební listy*, March 30–May 19, 1870), reprinted in Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu*, 146–178.

12 For the history of Umělecká beseda, see also Rudolf Matys, *V umění volnost. Kapitoly z dějin Umělecké besedy* (Prague: Academia, 2003).

13 Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu*, 150–151 (emphasis in original): “*právě proto*,” “ryze české opery národní,” “ryze, skrz na skrz německé.”



Figure 1: Josef Václav Myslbek: Bust of Smetana in the Národní divadlo (National Theater) (1894).
Inscription: "Tvůrci české národní opery" ("To the Creator of the Czech National Opera")

language is not a substantial dynamic that depends on a specific national idiom, but is rather a purely functional one that makes the Wagnerian model easily transferable from German to Czech. As Wagner drew the German quality of his music dramas from the German language, a purely Czech music drama would

result from a Czech poem if the same procedure were followed. Hostinský thus solved two problems at once: First, by turning the German stigma into a Czech principle, he was able to tie into the central importance of the Czech language in the context of the national movement. According to Hostinský, “there exists one *symbol*, and in many respects *the essence of nationality*: namely, **the mother tongue**. Whoever speaks it as we do, whoever claims it as his mother tongue, is a national; whoever renounces it, separates himself from the nation itself, is an apostate, a renegade. If we defend our national rights, we defend above all our language [...]”¹⁴ Second, the phrase “artwork of the future” (“Kunstwerk der Zukunft”) was predestined to represent a progressive nation. According to Hostinský, this politically relevant quality would be unattainable by using folk songs as demanded by František Pivoda in particular, as they were only “*fruits of the naive, [...] poetic and singing mind of our people*” and therefore not compatible with the self-image of a modern nation.¹⁵

When Hostinský’s “Wagnerianism” article was published in 1870, Smetana was well established in Czech musical life as a founding member of the Umělecká beseda and the head of its music department. He had also worked as a conductor at the Prozatímní divadlo for four years and was recognized as an opera composer. Smetana was immediately enthusiastic about the young doctoral student’s article. Since he was known to have been intensively involved with Wagner’s aesthetics, had cultivated contact with Franz Liszt, and had attended the 1870 performances of *Rheingold* and *Walküre* in Munich, Smetana’s interest hardly comes as a surprise. This common theoretical basis was largely responsible for Hostinský choosing Smetana as a model national composer. In his lecture series *Česká hudba 1864–1904*, printed in 1909, Hostinský expounded upon his apotheosis of Smetana as the forefather of Czech music. He continued to emphasize the link to Wagner’s aesthetics, although a few years before the outbreak of the First World War he felt compelled to use the nationalistically innocuous “music of the future” (“Zukunftsmusik”) instead of the term “New German School,” which “caused much evil in our Czech lands.”¹⁶

It can be assumed that the musically savvy Hostinský was aware of the discrepancy between the theory of the “music of the future” and Smetana’s

14 Ibid., 163 (emphases in original): “[...] jest taková *symbolem*, ba v mnohém ohledu i *podstatou národnosti*: totiž **mateřskou řeč**. Kdo jí mluví tak jako my, kdo se k ní přiznává, jako k své řeči mateřské, ten jest našincem, kdo se jí zříká, odštěpuje se od národa samého, jest odpadlíkem, odrodilcem. Hájíme-li svoje práva národní, hájíme především svůj jazyk [...]”

15 Ibid., 161 (emphasis in original): “*plody naivního, bezprostředního, všeho uměleckého sebevědomí prostého tvoření básnivě a zpěvně mysle našeho lidu*”

16 Hostinský, *Česká hudba 1864–1904*. V přednáškovém cyklu společenského klubu Slavia dne 19. dubna 1909 přednesl O. Hostinský (Prague: Grosman a Svoboda, 1909), 14: “hudba budoucnosti”; “škola novoněmecká – což ovšem u nás v Čechách způsobovalo mnoho zla.”

compositional practice. However, to legitimize Smetana's unique position as a progressive national composer, Hostinský had to associate even *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) with Wagner. Significantly, he not only limited himself to claiming a Wagner reception for Smetana's comic opera of 1866, but even turned the relationship on its head: in 1909, Hostinský declared *Prodaná nevěsta* to be the forerunner of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, which was completed a year and a half later. "It can be said that Smetana thus anticipated Wagner himself."¹⁷ Hostinský's image of the progressive Smetana who sacrificed himself for his homeland was ultimately adopted and further exaggerated by Hostinský's pupils.¹⁸ Particularly influential was Zdeněk Nejedlý (born in Litomyšl like Smetana), who was appointed professor of musicology at Prague Charles University in 1909, went into exile in the Soviet Union in 1939 with the support of the Communist Party, and returned in 1945, playing a key role in determining the Communist cultural policy of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic after the coup in 1948.¹⁹

Hostinský's image of Smetana provides far-reaching and illuminating insight into the aesthetic debates about Czech music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the debate is based almost exclusively on theory and not on Smetana's compositions themselves. Even if there is no question that Smetana was an enthusiastic "Wagnerian" at least since the Munich *Rheingold* and *Walküre* performances in 1870, this does not mean that his own operas should be understood along the lines of a music drama. Even Smetana, who had returned from Gothenburg in 1861 after five years, knew only too well that he had to be careful in Prague: with "Wagner's direction [...] I mustn't start if I don't want to block my way forever."²⁰ Even if this quote has only been handed down apocryphally by Přemysl Pražák, it precisely describes the general conditions of Czech musical life at the time.²¹ Smetana's prudence paid off as he was appointed music director at the Prozatímní divadlo in 1866 and advanced to become a

17 Hostinský, *Česká hudba 1864–1904*. V přednáškovém cyklu společenského klubu Slavie dne 19. dubna 1909 přednesl O. Hostinský (Prague: Grosman a Svoboda, 1909), 21: "Možno tedy říci, že tím Smetana předešel Wagnera samotného."

18 See Marta Ottlová, "The 'Dvořák Battles' in Bohemia," in *Rethinking Dvořák. Views from five countries*, ed. David R. Beveridge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 125–133; Leon Botstein, "Reversing the Critical Tradition. Innovation, Modernity, an Ideology in the Work and Career of Antonín Dvořák," in *Dvořák and his World*, ed. Michael Beckerman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 11–55: 17.

19 See Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Bedřich Smetana* (Prague: Hudební matice Umělecké Besedy, 1924–1929), 3 vol.

20 Přemysl Pražák, *Smetanovy zpěvohry* (Prague: Za Svobodu, 1948), vol. 1, 96: "Wagnerův směr ovšem již tehdy byl, ale věděl jsem, že s tím nesmím začít, nechci-li si zatarasit cestu na vždycky [...]"

21 For the repertory at the Prozatímní divadlo see Štěpán and Trávníčková, *Prozatímní divadlo*.

recognized opera composer in a few years' time with *Braniboři v Čechách* (*The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*), *Prodaná nevěsta*, and *Dalibor*. It is significant that Smetana began his work at the Prozatímní divadlo amid armed conflict and Prussia's decisive defeat of Austria at the Battle of Hradec Králové/Königgrätz on Bohemian soil in 1866. This fundamental crisis had immediate consequences for the opera business and its financing: The cast of soloists, chorus members, and orchestra players had shrunk massively due to the war, as did the audience. In this precarious situation, Smetana had to ensure the survival of Czech opera at all costs. His successful *Prodaná nevěsta* is a case in point, with its pragmatic concept closely linked to the limited artistic means and the taste of the dwindling audience. As illuminating as *Prodaná nevěsta* is for Smetana's ability to successfully create a folkloristic comic opera under the most adverse circumstances, it has little to do with Wagner's theory of music drama.²²

This book takes as its subject how Smetana counterbalanced his artistic ambitions with the limited possibilities in times of crisis. The aim is to place the composer and his stage works in the context of both European operatic practice and the institutional framework and political debates in Prague in the second half of the nineteenth century. Part One explores Smetana's operatic aesthetics, which were influenced by his experiences as a conductor at the Prozatímní divadlo, contemporary music theory, theater practice, and political ideals (Martin Nedbal, Arne Stollberg, Ivana Rentsch, Thomas Jaermann, Brian S. Locke). Part Two examines contemporary European opera repertoire in the Habsburg Empire and Smetana's engagement with it in the surviving sources (Axel Körner, Olga Mojžíšová, Sandra Bergmannová, Milan Pospíšil). As a counterpart to Smetana's European opera reception, Part Three discusses the early reception of Smetana in Europe and beyond (David Brodbeck, Vincenzina Ottomano, Christopher Campo-Bowen, Michael Beckerman).

22 See Ivana Rentsch, "Das Phantasma des eigenen Tons. Bedřich Smetanas *Prodaná nevěsta* (*Die verkaufte Braut*) und die Paradoxien der Nationalmusik im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Musik – Politik – Gesellschaft. Michael Walter zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Kordula Knaus and Susanne Kogler (Berlin: Metzler, 2023), 141–162.

I. Smetana's Opera Aesthetics

Bedřich Smetana and Operatic Classicism: Gluck, Mozart, and Beethoven at the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater)

1. Introduction

In the 1860s and 1870s, works by Gluck, Mozart, and Beethoven (specifically *Orfeo ed Euridice*, *Armide*, *Iphigénie en Aulide*, *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *Fidelio*), represented an ideologically significant portion of the Prozatímní divadlo's (Provisional Theater) repertoire. By paying attention to these works, Czech artists and audiences could both express their appreciation of historical operatic developments that were considered mainstream and link these developments to uniquely Czech national culture. Particularly significant in the Czech approach to these operas was the concept of *Werktreue*, the idea that works from the past could and should be presented with fidelity to the presumed—and sometimes imagined and mythologized—original intentions of their authors.¹ But as my exploration of production practices at the Prozatímní divadlo shows, Czech approaches to *Werktreue* in these works were anything but straightforward not only because the concept of fidelity is ambiguous—particularly in connection to eighteenth-century operas, which responded to constantly changing performance settings and conditions and were not conceived of in terms of reified masterworks in the first place—but also because they were driven by ideological and practical viewpoints. As both a critic and music director, Bedřich Smetana contributed to the complex approaches to operatic *Werktreue* in mid-nineteenth-century Prague.

Both Mozart and Gluck had a cult-like following in the Bohemian capital. Because Mozart visited Prague several times and two of his operas premiered there, he was considered an honorary Bohemian. Gluck's links to Prague were even stronger because he grew up in north Bohemia and started his musical career in the Bohemian capital. Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Prague's commentators constructed a patriotic discourse that emphasized the

1 On *Werktreue*, see Martin Nedbal, *Mozart's Operas and National Politics: Canon Formation in Prague from 1791 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023), chapter 1.

two composers' special relationship to Bohemia, helping them articulate their region's cultural uniqueness and at times even superiority, particularly compared to Vienna.² As the Bohemian artistic and intellectual community split into Czechs and Germans, moreover, Czech commentators re-articulated the two composers' links in terms of specifically Czech concerns. This rhetorical reconfiguration included claims that Gluck was an ethnic Czech and that both Gluck's and Mozart's music was influenced by Czech folk music.

The development of these rhetorical strategies is well illustrated in the Bohemian discussions about the music of Gluck. Bohemian writers had already started to appropriate Gluck's legacy for patriotic agendas during his lifetime. In the composer's first biography from 1775, Friedrich Justus Riedel claims that Saxon and Bohemian scholars have been competing for the honor of "owning someone like Gluck" ("einen Gluck zu besitzen") just as ancient Greek cities argued about being considered Homer's fatherland. Unlike later Bohemian commentators, who continually insisted that Gluck was a Bohemian (though one born in Bavaria), Riedel concluded that "the Germans have won" ("die Deutschen haben gesiegt").³ The idea that Gluck's music was uniquely related to Bohemia originated in the 1840s, when the Prague German journal *Bohemia* published a letter by the imaginary character Joseph der Brahmane to his imaginary friend Flamin, which identified Gluck as Bohemian and claimed that his music resembled folk songs.⁴ The author of the imaginary letter was probably Josef Bayer, but similar ideas reappeared in the writings of Bayer's Prague colleague, famous music historian August Wilhelm Ambros, in the 1860s. In 1865, Ambros provided specific examples of the connections between Gluck's music and Bohemian folk and church music:

Much has been written about Gluck, yet no one has observed that at times, his melodies resonate with a remarkably strong echo of Bohemian folk tunes. Those familiar with Bohemian folk songs will readily discern this resonance, for instance, in Orfeo's first aria "Chiamo il mio ben così," in the ballet piece in A major in the final act of the same opera, and in the song of Iphigenie in Aulis, "il faut de mon destin subir la loi sévère" [i.e., "Il faut

2 See *ibid.*, esp. chapter 2; and Martin Nedbal, "Christoph Willibald Gluck and National Politics in Nineteenth-Century Prague," *Divadelní revue* 34, no. 2 (2023): 59–82.

3 Friedrich Justus Riedel, *Über die Musik des Ritters Christoph von Gluck* (Vienna: Trattner, 1775), iv.

4 [Joseph Bayer,] "Über Gluck und seine Oper Alceste: Sendschreiben Joseph des Brahmanen an Flamin, den letzten Davidsbündler," *Bohemia* (November 20, 1846): 4. August Wilhelm Ambros later referred to this essay as an "Alceste philippic" ("Alcesten-Philippika"). See August Wilhelm Ambros, "Musik. Acta Davidsbündeliana," *Bohemia* (May 25, 1847): 3. Some historians have suggested that Ambros himself may have written the essay under Bayer's name. See, Bonnie Lömnas, Erling Lömnas, and Dietmar Strauss, *Auf der Suche nach der poetischen Zeit: Der Prager Davisbund: Ambros, Bach, Bayer, Hampel, Hanslick, Helfert, Heller, Hock, Ulm*, vol. 1 (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 1999), 151.

de mon destin subir la loi suprême”]. Furthermore, it is quite conceivable that in the finale of *Orfeo*, “Trionfi amore,” the great master may have found himself humming some half-forgotten “Gloria in excelsis” from Prague’s Church of the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star.⁵

Whereas Bayer and Ambros connected Gluck’s music to Bohemian musical traditions in general (both folk and church music), Czech writers of the 1860s postulated connections between Gluck’s operas and Czech folk music specifically, as illustrated in an 1864 article about Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Ladislav Emanuel Labler-Daskovský:

[...] we are resolutely opposed to the idea proclaimed by German musicians that Gluck was a German composer and Gluck’s music was German. Although we dutifully studied the score [of *Orfeo*], we were unable to find the so-called German character. It is unnecessary to point out that Gluck set to music an Italian, not a German, text. We have a greater right to claim that Gluck’s music bears prominent Czech traits. Not only in the natural shortness of periods, which is typical for Czech music and Czech language, but also the remarkable similarity to Czech national songs (compare the main motive of recitative No. 24 to “horo vysoká jsi”), and the resemblance, which is obvious even to amateurs, of not only *Orfeo* but also the operas composed after *Orfeo* to compositions by Czech masters could provide a lot of evidence to determine the Czech character of Gluck’s music.⁶

- 5 August Wilhelm Ambros, “Musikalische Briefe aus Prag I,” *Österreichische Revue* 3, no. 6 (June 1865): 193: “So viel und vielerlei über Gluck geschrieben worden, noch niemand hat bemerkt, dass aus seinen Melodien zuweilen ein überaus starker Ausklang an die Weise böhmischer Volkslieder heraustönt. Wer mit böhmischem Volksgesange vertraut ist, wird diesen Ausklang z. B. aus der ersten Arie des Orfeo ‘Chiamo il mio ben così,’ aus dem Balletstücke in A-dur im letzten Acte derselben Oper, aus dem Gesange der Iphigenie in Aulis ‘il faut de mon destin subir la loi severe’ deutlich heraushören, und dass bei dem Schlussgesange im Orfeo ‘Trionfi amore’ dem großen Meister irgend ein halbvergessenes Gloria in excelsis aus der Kirche der Kreuzherren mit dem rothen Herzen im Kopfe nachgesummt, könnte man fast wetten.”
- 6 [Ladislav Emanuel] L[able]r[-Daskovský], “Orfeus a Euridika. Zpřevohra od Křištofa, rytíře Glucka,” *Hlas* (December 17, 1864): 2: “[...] opíráme [se] rozhodně proti tomu, že němečtí hudebníci vesměs vyhlášují Glucka za skladatele německého a hudbu Gluckovu za německou. Ač jsme svědomitě partituru studovali, nebyli jsme s to, nikde najít tak zvaný německý ráz. Že Gluck italský a nikoli německý text uvedl do hudby, netřeba podotýkati. Větším právem bychom mohli tvrditi, že hudba Gluckova nese na sobě mnoho rázu českého. Nejen Čechům jako v hudbě tak i v mluvě přirozená krátkost periodiky ale i nápadné podobenství s českými národními nápěvy (srovnej číslo 24 recitativ, hlavní motiv s ‘horo vysoká jsi’) i laikům do očí bijící podobnost nejen Orfea ale i po Orfeu povstalých oper se skladbami českých mistrů, mohlo by dosti podati důkazů, kdyby se o to jednalo určití ráz český hudby Gluckovy.”

Similar views continue to be presented by Czech music critics into the twentieth century,⁷ and claims about connections to Czech folk music also start appearing in discussions of Mozart's music.⁸ One can therefore imagine that mid-nineteenth-century Czech audiences considered the music they heard in performances of Gluck's and Mozart's operas at the Prozatímní divadlo at least partially national.

Werktreue represented a significant aspect of Bohemian notions of a special relationship to Gluck and Mozart. In connection to Mozart's music, *Werktreue* consideration had already appeared in the 1790s. Prague's critics, led by Franz Xaver Niemetschek, Mozart's first biographer, emphasized the need to present Mozart's operas in forms that were as close as possible to how they were initially produced under Mozart's direction. One aspect of this discourse was the critique of later adaptations of Mozart's operas. For example, in 1796 a Prague critic complained about the German production of *Don Giovanni* by the company of Karl Franz Guolfinger von Steinsberg at the Nostitz Theater because it interpolated spoken dialogue and cut the *scena ultima* of the second-act finale.⁹ Interest in *Werktreue* was appropriated by the Czech nationalist movement in the 1820s, when a newly formed Czech opera company produced Czech adaptations of four of Mozart's works (*Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and *Così fan tutte*) at the Estates (formerly Nostitz) Theater. In a review of an 1827 Czech performance of *Don Giovanni*, for example, Josef Krasoslav Chmelenský complained that the Czech company did not perform the *scena ultima*, attributed the excision to German practices, and expressed hope that the Czech troupe could present the opera as it had appeared under Mozart's direction four decades earlier.¹⁰ As if in response to Chmelenský's request, on October 27, 1827, the Czech company announced for the next day a performance of musical numbers usually omitted from the second act of *Don Giovanni*, including the *scena ultima*.¹¹

7 See Jan Löwenbach, "Gluck and the Czechs," *Slavonic and East European Review* 3 (1944): 78–79.

8 See Nedbal, *Mozart's Operas and National Politics*, 71–78.

9 "Prag. Aufgeführte Stücke im k. k. Nazionaltheater im Monat Oktober 1796," *Allgemeines europäisches Journal* no. 11 (1796): 189–190. See also Nedbal, *Mozart's Operas and National Politics*, 23.

10 [Josef Krasoslav Chmelenský,] "Divadlo české roku 1827," *Časopis českého Museum* 1 (1827): 139–140.

11 See Nedbal, *Mozart's Operas and National Politics*, 26–34.

2. Smetana and *Werktreue* in *Le nozze di Figaro*

Mozart's operas were central repertoire of the Prozatímní divadlo in the 1860s, and three of them, *Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *Le nozze di Figaro*, received numerous performances. The Prozatímní divadlo did not introduce any radical changes to *Don Giovanni* and *Die Zauberflöte*, possibly because they had been performed in Czech since the 1820s. *Le nozze di Figaro*, by contrast, had been performed in Czech only once, in 1852, and according to critics that performance was disastrous.¹² The opera therefore was quite new for Czech audiences, and its Czech adaptation underwent substantial revisions. These revisions are obvious from both the reviews of individual performances and remnants of the performing materials used at the Prozatímní divadlo: a prompter's score and a volume of a conducting score that includes the third act of the opera.¹³ These scores show that during the Prozatímní divadlo era, the opera was performed in two acts, as opposed to the original four, and that to segue between acts 3 and 4, the Czech productions repeated the march that opens the third-act finale. The Prozatímní divadlo first performed *Figaro* on January 26, 1865, when the company was under the direction of Jan Nepomuk Maýr, whose wife Emílie Maýrová provided the first Czech translation of the opera (using her maiden name Ujka). This translation continued to be used at the Prozatímní divadlo under Smetana and beyond, although it was heavily criticized by reviewers: in 1852, Ferdinand Břetislav Mikovec called it "gibberish" ("hatlanina");¹⁴ in 1868, Jan Ludevít Procházka wrote it was "archaic, awkward, and often directly contrary to the composer's intention" ("staré, nejpné, a tendenci skladatelově často přímo odporující");¹⁵ and in 1883, Václav Vladimír Zelený called it "a completely botched caricature" ("pravý paskvíl").¹⁶ It is unclear why the adaptation continued to be used until the 1880s even though Jindřich Böhm had published a new and updated translation in 1875.¹⁷

As a music critic for *Národní listy* between May 1864 and April 1865, Smetana reviewed the 1865 Czech production of *Figaro*, and his two articles on the opera spell out his historicist views that connect to earlier Bohemian approaches to

12 See *ibid.*, 248.

13 Both scores are preserved in Prague, Archive of the Národní divadlo, H120/18/1–2 and H120/P7.

14 [Ferdinand Břetislav Mikovec,] "Z Prahy. (České divadlo)," *Lumír* 2 (1852): 1103.

15 [Jan Ludevít] P[rocházka], "Literatura a umění. Divadlo," *Naše listy* 1 (November 10, 1868): 3.

16 [Václav Vladimír Zelený], "Česká zpěvohra," *Dalibor* 5 (1883): 85.

17 *Figarova svatba*, translated and updated by Jindřich Böhm (Prague: Mikuláš a Knapp, 1875).

Mozart.¹⁸ His review of the second performance of the Czech *Figaro* on January 29, 1865, uses the concept of *Werktreue* to complain about Maýr's tendency to make arbitrary cuts in operas, including those by Gluck and Mozart:

Ever since we have paid attention to our young opera [company], its development and progress, we have made the unpleasant observation that [the company's] directorship has made it a rule, or perhaps accepted as second nature, not to present artistic fruits in their original form, in their entirety, but to cut out from them whatever is deemed appropriate. We often look in vain for the reasons of this practice, perhaps a shortage of needed personnel, or a shortage of needed artistic ability of this or that member of the ensemble, or a necessity of staging. But we do not see any. The needed personnel are here, their artistry is sufficient, and no one has gotten gray hair from the scenic requirements in the works that have been performed here, because we tend to produce *en miniature* what requires much larger resources. What is the reason for why nearly all operas are shortened, often mercilessly? This approach has spared neither *Orfeo*, nor *Der Freischütz*, nor *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, nor *Don Giovanni*, nor Italian operas, and at the present *Le nozze di Figaro*. – In other theaters, individual numbers are sometimes left out, often not without reason. Here, arbitrariness reigns as the only rule in art.¹⁹

When he eventually succeeded Maýr as the Prozatímní divadlo's opera director in 1866 and created a new production of *Figaro* in 1868, Smetana was clearly concerned about *Werktreue*, although in a selective way. The prompter's manuscript score reflects the historicist changes likely executed under Smetana's leadership. For example, several pages of different paper were at some point inserted into the

18 [Bedřich Smetan]A, "Divadlo. 'Figarova Svatba' od Mozarta," *Národní listy* 5 (January 28, 1865): 2; and [Smetan]A, "Divadlo. 'Figarova svatba' od Mozarta," *Národní listy* 5 (January 31, 1865): 3.

19 Ibid.: "Pokud pozorujeme naši mladou zpěvohru, její vývin a pokrok, od té doby doznáváme ne právě potěšitelnou zkušenost, že se stalo při jejím vedení pravým zákonem či snad druhou přirozeností, nepředváděti umělecké plody v původní jich podobě, v jich celistvosti, nýbrž utrhovati od nich, kolik se právě líbí. Hledáme často marně po nějakém trefném důvodu toho, snad v nedostatku potřebného personálu neb v nedostatku potřebné umělosti toho neb onoho z personálu anebo v nějaké scénické nutnosti. Ale nenalézáme žádného. Neboť potřebný personal jest zde, umělost solistů vystačuje všem požadavkům všech děl posud dávaných, pro scenerii, jak známo, posud nikdo u nás nesešedivěl, neboť dává se en miniature, co by sebe větší prostory požadovalo. V čem tedy vězí příčina, že se skoro všechny zpěvohry přistřihují a to často nemilosrdně? Touto operací nebyl ušetřen ani 'Orfeus' ani 'Kouzelný střelec,' ani 'Lazebník Sevillský,' ani 'Don Juan,' ani italské zpěvohry a nyní také ne 'Figarova svatba.' – Na jiných divadlech vynechávají se někdy pro nepředvídané překážky jednotlivá čísla, aspoň zajisté ne bez důvodů. U nás ale zdá se, že libovůle panuje co jediný zákon v umění."

prompter's score, and they contain those numbers that Smetana pointed out as missing in his 1865 review, most prominently the Andante (Fandango) section from the third-act finale (mm. 132–174). One of the most unusual aspects of Smetana's *Figaro* was his decision to include Don Basilio's fourth-act aria "In quegl'anni, in cui val poco," which was rarely performed in the nineteenth century and is still cut from many present-day productions.²⁰ At the same time, Smetana never seems to have reinstated another cut that he complained about in 1865: mm. 118–132 in the second-act trio "Susanna, or via, sortite." Someone, possibly Smetana, merely added a handwritten note in the prompter's score that points out the obvious: "missing" ("schází"). Also, the prompter's score does not contain the second-act duet "Aprite presto aprite" for Susanna and Cherubino, which Smetana noted was missing in his review, although he admitted that the duet's excision was not as problematic as Maýr's tempos. Smetana also noted but was not too bothered by the transposition of the Countess's third-act aria "Dove sono i bei momenti" from C to B-flat major—the prompter's score contains a handwritten note ascribing the transposition to Helena Zawiszanka, who appeared in the role only in 1865 (under Maýr), and Smetana must have returned to the original key in his 1868 production (when the Countess was sung by Emílie Bennewitzová).

Partially thanks to Smetana, *Figaro* became a symbol for the cultural achievements of the Czech national movement. Smetana touched on this symbolic importance in his 1865 review of Maýr's production:

Le nozze di Figaro, Mozart's most ingenious opera after *Don Giovanni*, has been the object of our desire for a long time [...]. We don't want to discuss the worth or morality of the subject, which, as is known, was written by Abate da Ponte on the basis of Beaumarchais's comedy of the same name; we gladly leave it to each individual to evaluate what they think about it. We want to focus on the musical aspect of the opera. And in this respect, we need to profess that this opera will remain an inimitable model of the most pleasurable caprice and the most fast-paced comedy without ever overstepping the boundaries of beauty or straying into the realm of the trivial.²¹

20 That the aria became part of the opera is clear both from the fact that it was additionally inserted into the prompter's score and from an 1868 review in *Naše listy*, praising Antonín Barcal's rendition of Basilio's "song in donkey's skin." P[rocházka], "Literatura a umění. Divadlo," *Naše listy* 1 (November 10, 1868), 3.

21 [Smetana]A, *Národní listy* 5 (January 28, 1865): 2: "Figarova svatba, po 'Don Juanu' nejgeniálnější zpěvohra Mozartova, byla již dávno předmětem naší touhy [...] Nechceme zde šířiti se o ceně neb mravnosti látky, jak známo, dle Beaumarchaisovy veselohry téhož jména od abbate da Ponte zpracované; ponecháváme to rádi posouzení každého jednotlivce, co a jak o tom asi smýšlí. Chceme zůstat jen při hudební části zpěvohry. A tu vyznati se musí, že tato zpěvohra zůstane nedostížitelným [sic] vzorem nejrozkošnějšího rozmaru a nejchvatnější komiky, aniž by kdes opouštěla meze krásy aneb zabloudila do oboru triviálnosti."

Smetana expresses his reverence to *Le nozze di Figaro* in an almost religious manner and sets the tone for future Czech criticism of the opera. In response to the opening performance of Smetana's 1868 *Figaro* production at the Prozatímní divadlo (November 6, 1868), Procházka referred to the opera as "a holy relic" ("svatá relikvie") which the Czech audience approaches with "a sacred feeling" ("posvátný cit").²² In his review of the performance that followed on November 17, 1868, Procházka describes the religious atmosphere surrounding the opera in greater detail:

Le nozze di Figaro is now the shining star of our repertoire, and we bask delightfully in its magical light. Each performance attracts abundant audience, scene after scene is rewarded with general applause, and a deep silence, which accompanies all the moments that Mozart's genius imbued with the sign of immortality, always instills a somewhat festive feeling to the whole evening.²³

In the middle of the nineteenth century, *Le nozze di Figaro* became a Czech national classic of sorts, and by attending and appreciating performances of Mozart's famous *opera buffa*, Czech audiences demonstrated their artistic cultivation.

Enthusiasm for *Le nozze di Figaro* was not merely aesthetic but also politically motivated. The political subtext of *Figaro* in the Czech theater becomes clear from Procházka's review of the opera's second performance under Smetana, on November 8, 1868:

This "beloved song" of Mozart, as he himself liked to call his *Figaro*, overpowered all rivals who opposed it, especially its first antagonist, Martín y Soler's *Una cosa rara*, which the Viennese preferred in 1785, allowing *Figaro* to fail completely. One year later, *Figaro* won its first triumph on the Prague stage, which was decisive for the musical world, Prague's judgment had an enormous weight at that time and prompted Mozart to declare the famous statement: "People of Prague understand me, I want to write an opera for them"—and that opera was the immortal

22 P[rocházka], "Literatura a umění. Divadlo," *Naše listy* 1 (November 8, 1868): 2.

23 P[rocházka], "Literatura a umění. Divadlo," *Naše listy* 1 (November 19, 1868): 3: "Figarova svatba' jest nyní zářící hvězdou v našem repertoiru, v jejímžto kouzelném světle se mile kocháme. Každá reprisa přiláká hojně obecnstva, scéna za scénou bývá přijata s potleskem všestranným, a hluboké ticho, kteréž při všech místech panuje, jímž genius Mozartův vdech znak nesmrtnosti, dodává celému večeru vždy jakéhosi rázu slavnostního."

Don Juan. Figaro therefore has a special value for us, and we can also call it our “beloved” opera.²⁴

Procházka here appropriates *Figaro* for the national cause though he does not go as far as calling it a national opera. Performing the opera, Procházka continues, shows the Czech theater in an honorable light. Patriotic references to the links between Prague, Mozart, and *Figaro* continue to appear in Czech reviews of the opera through the following years, as shown in a review by Emanuel Chvála from 1881:

We sorely missed this bright dramatic work of the musical master, which should not be forgotten for too long in the program of any opera theater, in the repertoire of our theater for a long time; we therefore welcomed the performance of *Le nozze di Figaro* all the more joyfully, particularly since the production demonstrated that our land still preserves the piety and love for the opera, which, according to Mozart’s own words, was best understood in Prague from the very beginning.²⁵

3. Nationalizing Gluck

The concept of nationalistic *Werktreue* was also associated with the Prozatímní divadlo’s productions of Gluck’s operas. The Czech institution became a major center for Gluck’s works in the 1860s, with productions of *Orfeo* in 1864, *Armide* in 1866, and *Iphigénie en Aulide* in 1872. The initial impulse for these productions came from Ferdinand Náprstek, descendant of a rich Prague beer-

24 P[rocházka], “Literatura a umění. Divadlo,” *Naše listy* 1 (November 10, 1868): 3: “Mozartova tato ‘zamilovaná píseň,’ jak sám ‘Figara’ svého rád nazýval, přetrvávala všechny soupeře, kteří proti ní byli vystoupili, nejrychleji pak prvního svého antagonistu, Martinovu zpěvohru “‘Una cosa rara,’ které Vídeňáci r. 1785 dali přednost, nechavše ‘Figara’ úplně propadnouti. Rok na to vydobyl si ‘Figaro’ na pražském jevišti první a pro ostatní svět hudební také rozhodné štěstí, úsudek Pražanů měl tenkrát velikou váhu a přiměl Mozarta k známému výroku: ‘Pražané mi rozumějí, jim napsati chci zpěvohru’ – a zpěvohra ta byl nesmrtelný ‘Don Juan.’ Mať tudíž ‘Figaro’ pro nás zvláštní cenu a můžeme jej také nazývatí naší ‘zamilovanou.’”

25 Emanuel Chvála, “Česká zpěvohra,” *Dalibor* 3 (1881): 102: “Nejjasnějšího toho dramatického díla velmistra hudebního umění, které by u žádného operního divadla nemělo na dlouhá léta přijíti v zapomenutí, postrádali jsme drahně času na repertoiru našeho divadla; tím radostněji uvítali jsme představení ‘Figarovy svatby’ a to v provedení, jež nasvědčovalo, že se u nás zachovala nejen pieta, ale i láska ku zpěvohře, již dle vlastních slov Mozartových Pražané již z počátku nejlépe porozuměli.”

brewing family and prominent patron of Czech national culture.²⁶ Náprstek and many other mid-nineteenth-century Czech nationalists expressed anti-German, and to some extent also anti-Austrian, sentiments by cultivating ties to French culture, which affected Náprstek's approach to Gluck's operas. On the day before the premiere of *Czech Orfeo*, Náprstek published a nationalistic proclamation about the opera in *Národní listy*, stressing the links between Gluck's family and Bohemia and between Gluck's melodies and Czech folk songs:

When we rightfully value the fact that the music reformer's family is related [to us], then we can boldly and not without justification consider Gluck a fellow countryman. The spiritual relationship between Gluck's songs and Czech songs is immediately obvious to experts; and it becomes even more profoundly apparent when we consider the spirit of both singing traditions.²⁷

Furthermore, Náprstek indirectly accuses Prague's German theatrical establishment (which had dominated Prague's scene until the founding of the *Prozatímní divadlo*) of neglecting the composer's legacy:

As is known, the main task is to clear the way to the public for one of the greatest geniuses of dramatic music—i.e., Gluck. Under bizarre circumstances, his acceptance was blocked specifically in the capital of the country that can be considered his homeland, and that Gluck himself called his homeland, and in the city that would like to count among its sons the immortal Mozart, who said that Prague “understands him” and who without Gluck would not embark on the pathway that brought him to unremitting supremacy in the realm of music.²⁸

Náprstek distinguished the Czech Gluck productions from earlier German approaches to the composer's operas by obtaining the scores for *Orfeo* and

26 On Náprstek's patronage of Czech opera, see Milena Secká, *Ferdinand Pravoslav Náprstek: Labužník života* (Prague: Národní muzeum, 2021), esp. 39–80.

27 Ferdinand Náprstek, “Zasláno. Veleváženým ctitelům klasické hudby zvláště nesmrtelného Křištofa Wilibalda rytíře Gluka,” *Národní listy* 4 (December 16, 1864): 3: “Klade-li se právem jistá cena na příbuzný rod reformátora hudby, tedy můžeme směle a ne bez důvodu vřaditi Gluka mezi našince. Duchovní příbuznost Glukova zpěvu s českým jest na první pohled znalci patrna; tož se ale tím zřejměji objeví, čím hlouběji se v ducha obojích zpěvů vnikne.”

28 Ibid.: “Jak známo již, jedná se o to, by se proklestila jednomu z nejvýtečnějších geniů dramatické hudby – Glukovi totiž – dráha k veřejnosti. Podivuhodným způsobem byla mu zatarasena právě v hlavním městě oné země, která se může za jeho vlast považovati, a kterou Gluck sám za svou vlast vyhlásil, a v onom městě, které by rádo vřadilo mezi syny své nesmrtelného Mozarta, který o Praze řekl, ‘že mu rozumí, a jenž by bez Gluka nebyl krácel onou dráhou, na kteréž nabyt až dosud neochabující nadvlády v říši hudby.’”

Armide from France rather than German sites with a tradition of producing these works, particularly Berlin and Vienna. In the same proclamation published in *Národní listy*, Náprstek announces that he donated published scores of the Italian and French versions of *Orfeo* to the Prozatímní divadlo:

To prepare this production in the most careful and dignified way, it was ensured that this work be presented most completely and without adding or excising anything by making use of both the Italian and the supplementary French scores.²⁹

The two scores that Náprstek refers to may have been the first edition of the original Italian *Orfeo ed Euridice*, published in Paris in 1764, and the first edition of the French *Orphée et Euridice* from 1774. The scores are now lost, but the conducting score for the 1866 Czech production of *Armide*, preserved in the Národní divadlo's (National Theater) archive, is the 1777 edition of the opera with a dedication by Náprstek to the Prozatímní divadlo:

To the Royal Regional Czech Theater in Prague. Provided for a production under the directorship of Mr. Fr. Thomé. Libretto by Philippe Quinault. Czech Translation by Jindřich Böhm. Donated by Ferda Náprstek. Prague, November 18, 1865.³⁰

The use of published scores for productions of historical operas was unusual at the Prozatímní divadlo in the 1860s. The scores used in mid-nineteenth-century Czech productions of *Le nozze di Figaro*, for example, were manuscripts with German texts, likely inherited from Prague's German theater. Purchasing published orchestral scores from Paris was both unusual and politically significant because it helped the Prozatímní divadlo avoid depending on Prague's German theater and on performing materials associated with German adaptations of Gluck's operas performed throughout German-speaking central Europe.

The 1865 *Armide* score does show, however, that the Prozatímní divadlo's 1866 production partially relied on German performance traditions, which complicates Náprstek's notion of the nationalistic *Werktreue*. Despite using the French score, the 1866 Czech production followed a German adaptation of the work that

29 Ibid.: "Aby se představení co nejbedlivěji a nejdůstojněji provedlo, je o to postaráno, by dílo toto, užitím obou partitur, italské a doplňující francouzské, co nejúplněji se podalo, aniž by se cos vynechalo, neb přidalo."

30 Prague, Archive of the Národní divadlo, M116/P1: "Královskému zemskému českému divadlu v Praze. Dáno k provozování za ředitelství pana Fr. Thomé-a. Libretto od Filipa Quinault-a. Český překlad od Jindřicha Böhma. Věnuje Ferda Náprstek. V Praze dne 18ho listopadu 1865."

originated in Berlin and spread to Dresden. Náprstek's French score contains several penciled-in Italian phrases: "Dresden via" ("Dresden cut"), which suggests that the reviser of *Armide* for the Czech stage consulted the German adaptation produced by Richard Wagner at the Dresden Hofoper (court theater) in 1843. The only extant score documenting nineteenth-century Dresden productions of *Armide* is a manuscript with a German-language adaptation of the opera preserved in the Sächsische Landesbibliothek.³¹ The score is dated 1845 and ascribed to Christian Wilhelm Fischer, the stage and choir director of the Dresden court opera, who, according to Wagner, copied music of "older masters" for personal enjoyment and study.³² It is unclear how exactly this score relates to the missing conducting score of the Dresden *Armide*, but it does demonstrate indebtedness to the Berlin adaptation of *Armide* as performed under Gasparo Spontini in 1837. Unlike Gluck's original, the Dresden score includes trombones, and a pencil note on the first page ascribes these added trombones to Spontini, suggesting that the Dresden score reflects the adaptation of the opera first created for Berlin.³³ The fact that the Dresden manuscript is mostly clean, without many additional markings that usually appear in conducting scores, suggests that it was not used during actual performances and probably served as Fischer's study or reference score. Several features of the Dresden score, nevertheless, resemble what we know about Spontini's Berlin *Armide* of 1837. For example, the Dresden score contains alterations in the German text common in Berlin librettos from the 1830s.³⁴ As one contemporaneous review points out, moreover, the 1837 Berlin *Armide* cut the fourth-act scene with a demon who appears to the Christian knight Ubalde in the form of his former lover Mélisse and tries to seduce him to prevent him from freeing Renaud from Armide's snares.³⁵ The same cut (act 4, scene 4, mm. 1–133) is also indicated (through a "vi-de Duetto") in the Dresden score. Most of the idiosyncratic features of the Dresden score are also marked in the Prague score, including the cut in act 4. Moreover, wherever the Dresden version added trombones, the note "tromboni" is often written into the Prague score.

The reliance on German approaches to Gluck's French operas became even more prominent in the 1872 production of *Iphigénie en Aulide*, this time under

31 Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Mus.3030-F-64b.

32 Richard Wagner, "Dem Andenken meines theuren Fischer," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 21, no. 23 (December 2, 1859): 4.

33 As Eric Schneeman points out, moreover, the same note that entered the comment about Spontini also added the names of the Dresden cast as their characters appear in the score. Eric Olds Schneeman, *The German Reception of Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2013), 239.

34 Ibid., 240.

35 The review appeared in the *Berlinische Nachrichten* (January 30, 1837) and is cited in Schneeman, *The German Reception of Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck in the Early Nineteenth Century*, 235.

Smetana's direction. In 1872, the Prozatímní divadlo team did not use any published French and Italian scores, instead relying on a manuscript copy of Wagner's 1847 adaptation of the opera for Dresden. Wagner's adaptation also received enthusiastic praise by Procházka, who stressed both the purportedly overlooked greatness of Gluck's music and Wagner's new ending of the opera, which replaces the celebrations of Iphigénie and Achilles's wedding with an energetic departure of the Greeks to Troy and has Diana carry Iphigénie to Tauris, so that Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* appears to be organic sequel.³⁶ Procházka's positive evaluation of Wagner's anti-historicist approach to Gluck's original score and his claim that Wagner "in no way changes the core of the work itself" show the adjustable nature of the *Werktreue* concept. Although Wagner's adaptation significantly changed Gluck's opera and therefore represented what earlier Czech productions of Gluck's and Mozart's works sought to overturn, in *Iphigénie en Aulide*, the Czech acceptance of Wagner's changes was seen as somehow preserving Gluck's original intention. Similar to many ideological concepts in nineteenth-century Czech national culture, *Werktreue* was therefore a malleable construct that could be easily adjusted to fit various momentary discursive needs.

4. The 1870 Czech *Fidelio* and Anti-Historicist *Werktreue*

Another aspect of the discursive complexity of *Werktreue* in Czech reception of classical operas at the Prozatímní divadlo can be observed in Smetana's approach to Beethoven's *Fidelio*, an example that also illustrates how Czech musicology at times succumbed to nationalist temptations produced by wishful historicist thinking. The first Czech production of *Fidelio* took place under Smetana's direction at the Prozatímní divadlo in 1870.³⁷ Smetana used an old manuscript score with a non-standard version of the opera titled *Leonore oder der Triumph der ehelichen Liebe*; as I have argued elsewhere, Smetana may have obtained the manuscript from theater entrepreneur Rudolf Wirsing who came to Prague from Leipzig to become the director of the Königlich deutsches Landestheater (Royal German Theater) in 1864.³⁸ The manuscript reflects a dutiful revision by Smetana and his collaborators to bring the non-standard score in line with Beethoven's final 1814 version of the opera. Leonore's first-act recitative and aria exemplify how Smetana and his Czech collaborators made the old *Leonore* manuscript fit the music of the 1814 *Fidelio*. In the *Leonore* manuscript, the

36 P[rocházka], "Literatura a umění. Divadlo," *Národní listy* 12 (April 13, 1872): 2.

37 See Martin Nedbal, "Beethoven and Bohemia: Dramaturgical and Political Aspects of *Fidelio* Reception in Prague," *Music & Letters* 103 (2022): 97.

38 Ibid., 102–105.

musical number opens with the recitative “Ach, brich noch nicht du mattes Herz,” which Beethoven had replaced with “Abscheulicher, wo eilst du hin?” in 1814. The pages with the earlier recitative are creased in the middle, suggesting they were folded at some point. The first unfolded page opens with measure 6 of the aria “Komm, Hoffnung, lass den letzten Stern,” in which the 1814 version mostly overlaps with the version in the *Leonore* manuscript.³⁹ This is also where the Czech translation, entered in pink, appears above the original German text, which is in black. The first unfolded page also has reddish glue stains, suggesting that the 1814 recitative was inserted into the score and later removed. Also, the ending of the aria was folded and does not include a Czech text. The much shorter 1814 ending must have been glued in, and the starting point of the insert is marked in the original score with blue crayon.

The score also suggests that in their preparations for the 1870 Czech production, Smetana and his collaborators consulted materials in the archive of Prague’s German theater. At the beginning of Florestan’s second-act aria “Gott, welch’ Dunkel hier,” someone added a Czech note: “the orchestral score of the German theater does not feature trombones” (“V partitūře německého div. žádné Pos:”). Whereas the version presented in the *Leonore* manuscript uses trombones in the introduction to Florestan’s aria, the standard 1814 version of the opera cut them, and the Czech reviser was therefore checking the *Leonore* manuscript against an 1814 *Fidelio* score in the German theater archive. Smetana and his team’s approach to creating a performance score for the 1814 *Fidelio* in 1870 was not dissimilar to that of modern music editors. After Smetana’s 1870 production, the *Leonore* manuscript was no longer used; the Czech company started using a published score of the opera. The old manuscript remained unnoticed in the Národní divadlo (National Theater) archive until the 1970s, when musicologist Oldřich Pulkert found it and established that it is the only surviving score of the second version of *Fidelio*, usually referred to as the 1806 *Leonore*.⁴⁰ Because they cut and folded pages and freely wrote into the manuscript, Smetana and his colleagues surely did not realize how valuable the score would be to later Beethoven research, nor that it contained autograph remarks in Beethoven’s hand.

In a move not dissimilar to nineteenth-century *Werktreue* procedures and without any reliable evidence, Pulkert claimed that the *Leonore* manuscript was sent to Prague by Beethoven in 1807, and that Prague, unlike any other city, saw performances of the opera’s early—and presumably more authentic—version from 1806 for the next several decades, including during the directorship of

39 See *ibid.*, 98.

40 Oldřich Pulkert, “Die Partitur der zweiten Fassung von Beethovens Oper *Leonore* im Musikarchiv des Nationaltheaters in Prag,” in *Bericht über den Internationalen Beethoven-Kongress 20. bis 23. März 1977 in Berlin*, ed. Harry Goldschmidt, Karl-Heinz Köhler, and Konrad Niemann (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1978), 247–256.

Carl Maria von Weber in the 1810s and under Smetana in 1870. The idea that the 1806 *Leonore* was performed in nineteenth-century Prague and by Smetana has appeared in later Czech secondary literature as well.⁴¹ Thus, although Smetana worked so dutifully to observe *Werktreue* to the 1814 *Fidelio* in his 1870 production, twentieth-century commentators, driven by a need to demonstrate Bohemia's *Werktreue* to the 1806 *Leonore* (which they considered superior to the 1814 version) obfuscated his efforts.

5. Conclusion

Smetana's interactions with the classical operatic repertoire of Gluck, Mozart, and Beethoven likely contributed to the unique stylistic synthesis in his own operas.⁴² Mozart's melodiousness and dramatic pace could be connected to portions of *The Bartered Bride* and other operatic comedies by Smetana, and the idealistic backbone of *Fidelio* is clearly related to *Dalibor*.⁴³ Similarly, Gluck's monumental, tragic musical tableaux, and the continuous, through-composed aspects of his works could be viewed as contributing to Smetana's departure from operatic conventions as strongly as Wagner's procedures are believed to.⁴⁴ But Smetana is also linked to the three classical composers by his engagement with the concept of patriotic or nationalist *Werktreue*, which represents yet another example of Czech national culture's complex and often contradictory relationship to German musical traditions.

41 See Nedbal, "Beethoven and Bohemia," 107–110.

42 Discussions of musical links between the works of Mozart and Gluck and Smetana's operas can be found in Jaroslav Smolka, "Modulace a tonální skoky v hudbě Bedřicha Smetany a jeho předchůdců," *Hudební věda* 24 (1987): 321–40; and Jaroslav Jiránek, "The Dramatic Style of Smetana's Operas," *Czech Music: The Journal of the Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak Music* 21 (1999–2000): 181–94.

43 On the links between *Fidelio* and *Dalibor*, see Jiří Vysloužil, "Beethovens *Fidelio* und Smetanas *Dalibor* aus musikalischer Sicht," in *Fidelio/Leonore: Annäherungen an ein zentrales Werk des Musiktheaters*, ed. Gernot Gruber (Anif: Müller-Speiser, 1998), 325–31.

44 See Nedbal, "Christoph Willibald Gluck and National Politics," for a related case study of how Gluck's *Armide* influenced Dvořák's last opera *Armida*.

A Representation of the “Grundidee”? Smetana’s Opera Overtures in Light of his Symphonic Poems

1

The function and style of the overture to an opera or drama has been the subject of much thought and debate since the mid-eighteenth century.¹ That the orchestral introduction should have something to do with the subsequent action met with broad theoretical consensus (not always in practice), yet the question of how music could succeed in articulating this connection met with different answers. Eduard Hanslick aptly summarized the state of the debate in 1846 when, in his elaborate review of Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, he distinguished between “three genres of operatic overtures”: First, the orchestral opening might be limited to a musical introduction into the first scene or describes what immediately precedes it—a kind of prehistory (Hanslick cites the orchestral visualization of the storm at the beginning of Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Tauride* as an example); second, the overture can attempt to give “a successive overview” of the entire plot, a condensed anticipation of the drama that will be subsequently shown on stage with all the main characters and narrative complexities; third, instead of a temporally compressed outline of all the events, it can present only the “Grundidee” (“basic idea”), or “the poetic soul of the entire work” as an “allegorical model” and “central point from which everything that follows as an unfolding of the particular.”²

When Hanslick names the third variant—the representation of the “basic idea” of the respective opera—as the favored solution without excluding the other options, his words correspond precisely with what Richard Wagner, later

- 1 See also Arne Stollberg, *Tönend bewegte Dramen. Die Idee des Tragischen in der Orchestermusik vom späten 18. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2014), 201–251; Steven Vande Moortele, *The Romantic Overture and Musical Form from Rossini to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 15–45.
- 2 Eduard Hanslick [sic!], “Richard Wagner, und seine neueste Oper ‘Tannhäuser’. Eine Beurtheilung [dritter Teil],” *Wiener allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* 6, no. 145 (December 3, 1846): 589–590 (emphasis in original).

his main adversary, had postulated five years earlier in the essay “De l’ouverture,” published in the Parisian *Revue et gazette musicale* in 1841 (quoted here according to the German version Wagner published in his *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* under the title “Über die Ouvertüre”). Wagner’s hypothesis is that music is entirely incapable of expressing “the details and intricacies of the plot itself,” at least without the composer being forced to “shatter his musical work” and ultimately ending up with a “potpourri” that simply allows the “passages of effect in the opera” to succeed one another instead of meeting the requirements of “the themes’ pure musical meaning.”³ The most felicitous examples of this type of overture are the “dramatic Fantasies” of Carl Maria von Weber, which take the principle of “unity” to heart, but the problem remains that they are “not understood or falsely comprehended” without knowledge of the opera; without this understanding, the listener’s “enjoyment in the ensuing explicit, dramatic work of art” is inevitably compromised because the composer has given away the course and, above all, the outcome of the plot.⁴ Wagner concludes that the overture should only present the “leading, main idea of the drama,” reproducing this “characteristic idea [...] with the intrinsic devices of autonomous music” to yield an “artistically self-contained, musically conceived counter-image” to the opera.⁵ The overture should serve as an “ideal prologue [...] to prepare for the drama”⁶ without being bound to the details of its progression and thus pushing back music’s own laws into the background to the benefit of extra-musical references.

At the beginning of the 1850s, Wagner fundamentally revised this view and debated the relationship between overture and symphonic poem with Franz Liszt, leading directly to the topic of this article.⁷ Buoyed by the idea that music—even with its expanded “linguistic capacity”⁸ through Beethoven—needs a connection to the drama in order to make itself understood, and that program music should therefore also be repudiated as a false path, Wagner fundamentally rejected overtures. It would be mere “vanity” on the composer’s part to believe that they could provide “absolute musical certainty about the

3 Richard Wagner, “Über die Ouvertüre [1841],” in Richard Wagner, *Dichtungen und Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe in zehn Bänden*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer (Frankfurt on the Main: Insel, 1983), vol. 5, 194–207, see in particular 196, 198, 199, 205.

4 Ibid., 198, 202.

5 Ibid., 196, 205, 199.

6 Ibid., 203.

7 See also Arne Stollberg, “Die Legitimität des Exzentrischen. Wagner, Liszt und das Problem musikalischer ‘Kühnheiten,’” *wagnerspectrum* 16, no. 2 (2020): 231–247; Christian Schaper, “Mittelweg nach Rom? Zum historischen Ort von Wagners *Tannhäuser*-Ouvertüre,” *wagnerspectrum* 14, no. 1 (2018): 129–149.

8 Richard Wagner, *Oper und Drama* [1852], ed. and commented on by Klaus Kropfinger, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 77.

course of the drama” in notes; at best, the works formed in this way “should be performed *after* the drama rather than *beforehand*” if the content is to be truly revealed to the audience.⁹ In an analysis of the *Tannhäuser* Overture written for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Wagner had his acolyte Theodor Uhlig sharpen his position once again, making the radical remark that that overture is also testament to a fundamental “aberration”: Wagner, Uhlig states, was not repeating the mistakes of his overture to *The Flying Dutchman*, which attempted “the impossible,” composing “the drama only in notes.”¹⁰ But even if the *Tannhäuser* Overture concentrates on the “main idea of the opera,” Wagner is still acting against his better judgment, i.e., against his own recognition that such “painterly musical art” always “wants to express more than it can.”¹¹ Anyone who does not know the opera, according to Uhlig, will find the overture “completely incomprehensible,” at least without an accompanying “program in words” (as indeed drafted by Wagner for the Zurich performance in 1852).¹²

As is well known, Wagner responded to this changed view by avoiding any overture that served a summarizing purpose in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, writing only comparatively short instrumental introductions to usher in each installment (the fact that large-scale orchestral preludes became the norm again from *Tristan und Isolde* onwards is another matter). He nevertheless faced opposition from a prominent but above-all decidedly sympathetic party: Franz Liszt. In a study on *Tannhäuser* published parallel to Uhlig’s text in 1851, Liszt stated that Wagner had, “despite his own theories,” created “a beautiful symphonic work” with the overture, which succeeded in an “admirable” way at reflecting “the idea of the drama” without lagging behind the opera for even an iota and without necessitating an “explanatory text.”¹³ That overture, Liszt wrote, “is a poem about the same subject matter as the opera, but just as comprehensive as the latter itself.”¹⁴ What is more, Liszt used the term “symphonic poem” (“poème symphonique”) for the very first time with regard to the *Tannhäuser* Overture,

9 Ibid., 354 (footnote, emphases are original).

10 T. U. [Theodor Uhlig], “Die Ouvertüre zu Wagner’s Tannhäuser,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 18, vol. 34, no. 15 (April 11, 1851): 153–156 and no. 16 (April 18, 1851): 165–168: 154.

11 Ibid., 155, 154.

12 Ibid., 155; see also Richard Wagner, “Programmatische Erläuterungen. [...] Ouvertüre zu ‘Tannhäuser’ [1852],” in Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen. Volks-Ausgabe* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel; Leipzig: C. F. W. Siegel (R. Linnemann), [1912–1914]), vol. 5, 177–179.

13 Franz Liszt, *Lohengrin et Tannhäuser de Richard Wagner* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1851); based on the translation by Ernst Weyden (*Richard Wagner’s Lohengrin und Tannhäuser* [Cologne: Franz Carl Eisen, 1852]) brought into German and ed. by Rainer Kleinertz: Liszt, *Lohengrin et Tannhäuser de Richard Wagner / Lohengrin und Tannhäuser von Richard Wagner* (Sämtliche Schriften, 4) (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1989), 121, 109.

14 Ibid., 119.

and the term he used instead of “overture” from 1854 for his own orchestral compositions in this genre.¹⁵

2

Bedřich Smetana moved precisely within this area of tension: With operatic aesthetic ideals that were on the one hand proximate to Wagner (in whatever way this can be conceived regarding compositional execution),¹⁶ he acknowledged Franz Liszt as a decisive role model throughout his life, particularly in the genre of the symphonic poem. The fact that his personal encounters with Liszt between 1856 and 1871 (including visits to Weimar in September 1857 and June 1859) had an almost catalytic effect on the young composer has not gone unnoticed and probably needs no further detailed explanation.¹⁷ Smetana immediately adapted the concept of the symphonic poem in his own work, which had a straight impact on the works of the Gothenburg period that reference literary models: the orchestral compositions *Richard III* op. 11 (after William Shakespeare, 1858), *Wallensteins Lager* (*Wallenstein's Camp*) op. 14 (after Friedrich Schiller, 1859) and *Hakon Jarl* op. 16 (after Adam Oehlenschläger, 1861). Smetana wrote about these borrowings from Liszt, which have been examined to the point

15 Ibid., 115 (French original: 114).

16 See also Ivana Rentsch, “Nationale ‘Zukunftsmusik’? Bedřich Smetanas *Dalibor* und die Debatte um eine tschechische Oper,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 52, no. 1/4 (2011): 209–217; Kelly St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana. Myth, Music, and Propaganda* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2017), 47–79.

17 See also Vl.[adimír] Hudec, “Zum Problem des ‘Lisztartigen’ in Smetanas symphonischen Dichtungen,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 5, no. 1/4 (1963): 131–137; M.[irko] Očadlík, “Die radikalen Demokraten – Liszt und Smetana,” *ibid.*: 241–247; Kenneth DeLong, “Hearing His Master’s Voice. Smetana’s ‘Swedish’ Symphonic Poems and their Lisztian Models,” in *Liszt and His World. Proceedings of the International Liszt Conference Held at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University 20–23 May 1993* (Analecta Lisztiana, 1 / Franz Liszt Studies Series, 5), ed. Michael Saffle (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1998), 295–334; Kenneth DeLong, “In the Master’s Footsteps: Programme and Musical Design in Smetana’s *Richard III*,” in *Bedřich Smetana 1824–1884. Report of the International Musicological Conference, Praha, 24th–26th May 1994*, ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Marta Ottlová (Prague: Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, 1995), 102–117; Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil, “Smetana und Liszt. Die Neudeutsche Schule und die tschechische Nationalmusik,” in *Liszt und Europa* (Weimarer Liszt-Studien, 5), ed. Detlef Altenburg and Harriet Oelers (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2008), 265–274; Kenneth DeLong, “Liszt and Smetana in the Mirror of Czech National Music,” in *Musik im Spannungsfeld zwischen nationalem Denken und Weltbürgertum. Franz Liszt zum 200. Geburtstag*, ed. Dorothea Redepenning (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015), 191–203; Thomas Järmann, “Im Geiste Liszts und doch ganz anders: Bedřich Smetana komponiert seine ersten Sinfonischen Dichtungen,” *Die Tonkunst* 8, no. 1 (2014): 74–85.

of postulating that each of these pieces is modeled on a specific Liszt score,¹⁸ himself: “They have a completely Lisztian form.”¹⁹ From first attempts in the field of orchestral program music, an arc can be drawn to the great cycle *Má vlast* without denying its autonomy and an innovative conception that extends beyond the Lisztian paradigm.²⁰

Returning to opera overtures, Smetana exercised remarkable restraint in his operas on serious or heroic subjects. *Braniboři v Čechách* (*The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*) and *Dalibor* enter *in medias res* and content themselves with short instrumental introductions to the first scene (29 quick bars in *Braniboři*, 15 slow bars until the curtain rises in *Dalibor*). Was this in the spirit of Wagner’s criticism of overtures? Hana Séquardtová seems to suggest this when she writes in her Smetana monograph that the listener only becomes familiar with the “thematic and motivic elements” of an opera over the “course of the action,” which is why any anticipation during an overture or a “long prelude” remains “incomprehensible.”²¹ However, it could be argued that Smetana was simply oriented toward other traditions: From around 1820, it had become increasingly common in French and Italian opera to compose short orchestral introductions instead of overtures. Extensive overtures were a peculiarity of German music theater until at least the late 1840s²²—in the words of Theodor Uhlig: an unquestioned “convenience” for the sake of which Wagner had written the *Tannhäuser* overture, despite having better insight.²³

The main objection to Séquardtová is that Smetana, as a Liszt devotee, would certainly not have believed that music without text and the presentation of a dramatic action was inevitably “incomprehensible.” Rather, he could have been influenced by the idea that a large-scale overture as an “anticipated résumé” (Uhlig) would be detrimental to the effect of the event onstage.²⁴ Smetana largely reserved overtures for his comic operas, where they do not have the task of setting the “*Grundidee*,” the “leading, main idea of the drama,” to music, but where they pursue the goal of musically setting in motion the lively, turbulent impetus of the subsequent action. For example, the overture to *Dvě vdovy* (*The*

18 Compare with DeLong, “Hearing His Master’s Voice”; the model for *Richard III* was therefore *Tasso. Lamento e trionfo*, *Wallenstein’s Camp* followed *Mazeppa*, and *Hakon Jarl* had as his blueprint *The Battle of the Huns*.

19 Quoted according to Järmann, “Im Geiste Liszts und doch ganz anders,” 84.

20 Compare with Linda Maria Koldau, *Die Moldau. Smetanas Zyklus “Mein Vaterland”* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 145–151.

21 Hana Séquardtová, *Bedřich Smetana*, adapted from Czech by Jan Gruna (Leipzig: Reclam, 1985), 110.

22 Compare with Vande Moortele, *The Romantic Overture*, 34–35.

23 [Uhlig], “Die Ouvertüre zu Wagner’s Tannhäuser,” 155.

24 *Ibid.*, 153.

Two Widows) establishes the *tinta musicale* of the opera²⁵ with the perpetuum-mobile momentum of melodic rotations set to a constant rhythm, which returns at the beginning of act 2 (orchestral prelude and Karolina/Anežka duet). Musical anticipations of later numbers are of course included in the overture concept, but without claiming to represent the “basic idea,” as already mentioned. Formally more traditional, but also not designed according to the principle of potpourri, Smetana’s cheerful overtures reveal no obvious proximity to the idea of the symphonic poem, as Liszt claimed it for Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* overture. It is therefore revealing that the overture to *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*), which is clearly based on sonata form—with a brief development section (mm. 189–219) and a coda that at first swerves widely in terms of tonality (mm. 367–465)—was apparently written prior to the body of the opera and premiered in November 1863 only as a “comic overture.”²⁶

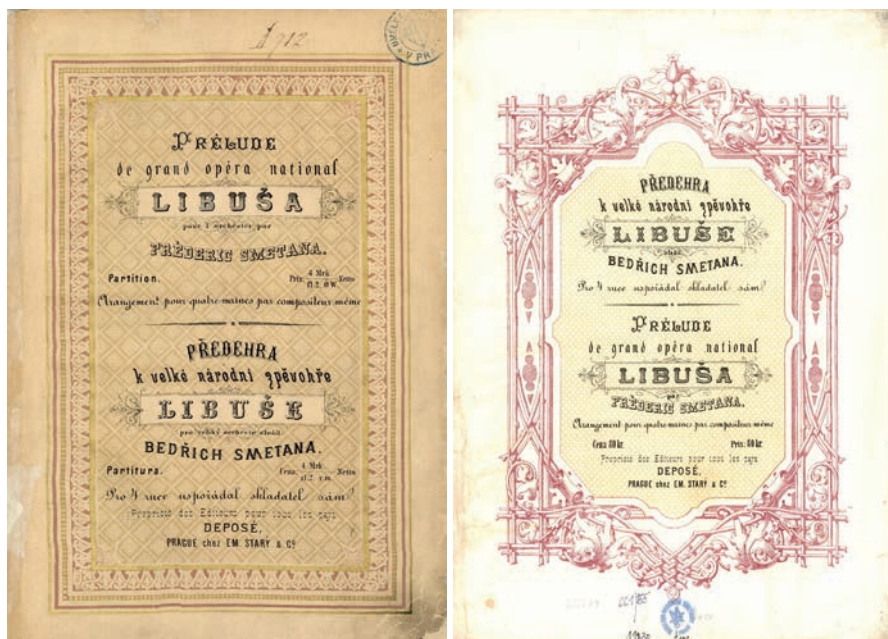
There are, however, two exceptions: first, the introduction (“úvod”) to the comic-romantic opera *Čertova stěna* (*The Devil’s Wall*), which not only foreshadows themes from the work but also enmeshes them in a dramatic confrontation that could be said to correspond to the “main idea” of the plot. The scope, of 48 bars, admittedly remains bound to the model of short introductions and does not unfold into a format that aims for autonomy. Second, the orchestral prologue to *Libuše*, which will be discussed below, is a different case: Not only did Smetana deviate from his concept of leaving serious operas without a longer instrumental preamble, the “prelude” (“prélude,” “předehra”) to *Libuše* was also printed separately as a full score and in a four-hand piano reduction (under the French-Czech title *Prélude de grand opéra national Libuše / Předehra k velké národní zpěvohře Libuše*, figures 2 and 3) and performed several times in concert (for the first time on April 14, 1872, under Smetana’s direction in Prague’s Žofín Palace). This remarkable situation raises the question of how the relationship is formed between the orchestral beginning of an entire opera and a symphonic poem standing on its own.

The term “prelude”—instead of “overture”—should not be assigned too much weight, for by 1872 what Steven Vande Moortele has labeled a distinguishing criterion had long lost its validity: an “overture,” in contrast to a “prelude,” was “a substantial and self-contained piece that is separate, or at least ‘separable,’ from the beginning of the opera that follows it.”²⁷

25 With regard to this category of opera aesthetics, which conceptually extends back to Giuseppe Verdi, see Anselm Gerhard, “‘Tinta musicale.’ Flotows *Martha* und die Frage nach Möglichkeiten und Grenzen musikalischer Analyse in Opern des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 61, no. 1 (2004): 1–18; Anselm Gerhard, “Techniken der Vereinheitlichung: die ‘tinta musicale,’” in *Verdi-Handbuch*, ed. Anselm Gerhard and Uwe Schweikert, rev. ed. (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler/Bärenreiter, 2013), 234–239.

26 Compare with Séquardtová, *Bedřich Smetana*, 99–100.

27 Vande Moortele, *The Romantic Overture*, 34.



Figures 2 and 3: *Prélude de grand opéra national Libuše* / *Předehra k velké národní zpěvohře Libuše*, title pages of the score and of the four-hand piano reduction, Prague: Starý, [1875]²⁸

This definition certainly applies to the *Libuše* prelude, and so it may be no wonder that at least one later printed edition (Edition Eulenburg) declares the composition to be an “overture.”²⁹ Moreover, the word “předehra” in Czech can be translated to “overture.” In the full opera score,³⁰ as well as in the piano-vocal score,³¹ the same piece, like its much shorter counterpart at the beginning of *Čertova stěna*, is labeled “úvod” (“introduction”). Regardless of whether one translates “předehra” as “prelude” or “overture,” the term signals that the almost ten-minute work, dissociated from its introductory function in the following opera, claims autonomy and an aesthetic life of its own. Does this make it a symphonic poem?

28 Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše. Prélude de grand opéra*, score (Prague: Emanuel Starý, [1875], Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, Prague, collection NM-ČMH3, inv. č. př. 13/2001. Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše Předehra k velké národní zpěvohře*, four-hand piano reduction by the author (Prague: Emanuel Starý, [1875]), Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, Prague, collection NM-ČMH3, inv. č. S. 186.

29 Bedřich Smetana, *Overture to the Opera Libuše* [...] (Edition Eulenburg, 677) (London: Eulenburg, [ca. 1970]).

30 Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše. Slavnostní zpěvohra ve 3 odděleních. Slova od Josefa Wenziga*, ed. and commented by František Bartoš (Prague: Společnost Bedřicha Smetany, 1949).

31 Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše. Slavnostní zpěvohra ve 3 jednáních na slova Josefa Wenziga*, piano-vocal score by the composer, 8th ed. (Prague: Hudební matice Umělecké besedy, 1945).

In Liszt's words, a musical "poem about the same subject matter as the opera, but just as comprehensive as the latter itself"? The question, posed in this way, will now be discussed, with a comparative glance at *Richard III*.

3

For the purposes of this article, *Richard III* has the advantage that Smetana commented on it more thoroughly than on his later symphonic poems. He avoided the term "symphonic poem," suggesting that the work could have been composed as an overture to a performance of Shakespeare's tragedy.³² Smetana was undecided: On September 9, 1858, he wrote to his former teacher Joseph Proksch that the piece was "a kind of musical illustration [...], although not an overture, and also not a symphony."³³ Proksch nevertheless spoke laconically of an "overture to Richard III,"³⁴ and on January 5, 1862, the composition had its premiere under the title "Fantasie zu Shakespeare's Tragedie" ("Fantasia on Shakespeare's Tragedy").³⁵ About the conception of the work, which remained entirely without a genre designation in the autograph (*To Shakespeare's Richard III for large orchestra*),³⁶ although avoiding any specification when speaking of "music to Shakespeare's Richard III," Smetana commented to Liszt: "It [*Richard III*] consists of one movement, and the accenting ('Betonung') more or less follows the plot of the tragedy: Attainment of the fixed goal after conquering all obstacles, triumph, and at last the hero's fall."³⁷ The accentuation of the narrative moment becomes clear, linked as it is to the co-existence and opposition of the two themes that Smetana associated with the characters of the tragedy: The main theme, prepared by the figurative "halting" introduction (mm. 26 ff., example 1), represents the "character of the hero himself [...] who is in action throughout the entire work;" and the secondary theme stands for the "opposite party" (mm. 45 ff., example 2).³⁸ The designations "main theme" and "secondary theme" were chosen purposefully, as the theme of the "opposite party" occupies the Vth degree (turned to major) of the home key of A minor when it is first heard as a

32 Compare with Järmann, "Im Geiste Liszts und doch ganz anders," 80.

33 Bedřich Smetana, *Korespondence/Correspondence*, vol. 1 (1840–1862), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press; Prague: Národní muzeum, 2016), 100–104: 100–101.

34 Ibid., 121–124: 123 (Joseph Proksch, letter to Bedřich Smetana, February 8, 1859).

35 Compare with *ibid.*, figure 44.

36 Compare with Olga Mojžíšová, "Smetana and Shakespeare," *Musicalia. Journal of the Czech Museum of Music* 9, no. 1/2 (2017): 68–80: 74.

37 Smetana, *Korespondence/Correspondence*, vol. 1, 107–112: 109, 110 (Bedřich Smetana, letter to Franz Liszt, October 24, 1858).

38 Ibid.

cantabile melody, inevitably provoking an association with the configuration of a typical sonata exposition.



Example 1: Bedřich Smetana, *Richard III*, mm. 26–32 (violoncellos)



Example 2: Bedřich Smetana, *Richard III*, mm. 45–48 (first violins)

The extent to which it makes sense or is misleading to apply the principles of sonata form to the following musical sequences remains to be seen.³⁹ It may well be indisputable that Smetana composes to the thread of the narrative, with corresponding motivic transformations typical of Liszt's symphonic poems (whereby it stands out that even the two inherently antipodal themes of *Richard* and his adversaries are brought into proximity with one another, above all through a common rhythmic formula; see examples 1 and 2).⁴⁰ It may suffice to focus on the triumphal episodes, the first and second of which, both in C major, symbolize the stages of Richard's ascent to the coronation and, accordingly, allow the theme of the "hero" to shine in all its glory (mm. 92 ff., mm. 184 ff.). Meanwhile, the third, now as a victorious transformation of the theme of the "opposite party" in A major (mm. 284 ff.), brings with it the actual (that is, tonal) resolution of all conflicts; at the beginning of that part of the formal scheme—which could be interpreted, together with Thomas Järmann, as a "reversed recapitulation" (mm. 215 ff.)⁴¹—the theme in question, as at the beginning of the piece, was still heard in E major, not in A major or A minor. The triumph of the secondary theme in major over the main theme reaches back to the concept of prominent opera overtures: Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz* or—less

39 Compare with the opposing positions of Thomas Järmann, "Im Geiste Liszts und doch ganz anders," 80, and Kenneth DeLong, "Hearing His Master's Voice," 314.

40 Compare with DeLong, "Hearing His Master's Voice," 310–311.

41 See note 38 above.

well-known today but not so at the time⁴²—Heinrich August Marschner's *Der Vampyr*. The boundary between overture and symphonic poem is as fluid here as Smetana's maneuvering between genre designations would suggest.

4

The prelude to *Libuše* is structured in such a way that any attempt to locate relics of sonata form seems obsolete (for the following, see table 1). Not only is there a lack of actual development passages, but apart from the brief E-flat major of the Přemysl motif (mm. 74 ff.), there is also no secondary tonal realm that would create a tension to be resolved with the home key of C major. Smetana operates with three themes or motifs, which in turn are closely related, so that no contrasts are to be found in the melodic surface area (example 3): The Libuše theme (mm. 26 ff.) represents—in Vladimír Karbusický's words—nothing more than a “lyrical variation” of the introductory triadic fanfares, melodically filling out their opening gesture, the falling fourth, and retaining the subsequent oscillating motion between fifth and third while continuing to spin out this thematic head in a cadential manner.⁴³ This is where the triplet comes into play (m. 32), which later returns in the Přemysl motif. Moreover, the Přemysl motif, which is played in full for the first time by the brass in bars 59 ff., is already linked back to the fanfares with the initial of the fourth interval (now ascending), just as the second-by-second striding through the fourth c’–g’ in turn comes from the Libuše theme. All the themes of the prelude are intertwined in such a way that contradictions and conflict are excluded from the outset, and with them the conflict-ridden, “dramatic” form of the sonata movement.

The prelude, like the opera itself,⁴⁴ tends toward a tableau-like static structure, and so it may be symptomatic that all the musical events arise from those solemn fanfares which, as incidental music in the first and third acts, stand for the “holy judgment” on Vyšehrad—symptomatic in the sense that the *dramatis personae*

42 Compare with Hanslik [sic!], “Richard Wagner, and his latest opera ‘Tannhäuser,’” 590; the overture to *Der Vampyr* serves here as a paradigmatic example of a score which sets out to give a “successive overview of the whole work to come” by “assembling the characters” (“Zusammenstellung der Charaktere”).

43 Vladimír Karbusický, “Libussa/Libuše. Das mythische Symbol des Patriotismus und seine Rolle in der Böhmisches Opernrepräsentation,” in *Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Mitteilungen der internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft an der Technischen Universität Chemnitz*, vol. 3, ed. Helmut Loos and Eberhard Möller (Chemnitz: Gudrun Schröder, 1998), 150–176: 173.

44 Compare with the essay by Ivana Rentsch in the present volume; see also Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil, “Smetanas *Libuše*. Der tschechische Historismus und die Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Festschrift Heinz Becker zum 60. Geburtstag am 26. Juni 1982*, ed. Jürgen Schläder and Reinhold Quandt (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1982), 237–248.

and their motifs are detached from the imaginary sense of a whole nation, only to be reabsorbed into a whole nation at the end when the fanfares return (mm. 113 ff.). It would be fitting that Smetana, as table 1 shows, develops the prelude from the festive march (“slavnostní pochod”) from the third act, or more precisely, adopts sections from it and alternates them with “free” passages, which nevertheless remain closely linked to the opera in motivic terms. The fact that before the E-flat major setting of the Přemysl theme (mm. 74 ff.) a string figure from the first act is incorporated into the prelude almost makes it a potpourri. Such an assessment requires caution, however, as it would be incorrect to speak of a mere paratactic sequence whose building blocks could also succeed one another in a different order.

Fanfares (mm. 1-4)

Libuše (mm. 26-30)

Přemysl (mm. 59-61)

Example 3: Bedřich Smetana, prelude to *Libuše*, thematic links

Although no drama occurs in the *Libuše* prelude, any more than in the opera itself, something is certainly “narrated,” that is, musically staged as a play according to the perspectives of proximity and distance. The maximum remoteness is marked by a tritone, the key of F-sharp major, which appears prominently twice in the context of C major. This occurs for the first time at the beginning after a short modulation passage following the exposition of the *Libuše* theme (m. 41, example 4). Into the opened musical space, against the pulsating of an insistent pedal point on F sharp, the horn plays the ascending fourth of the Přemysl motif (m. 43), triggering a progression that brings the signal announcing Přemysl (initially intertwined with the *Libuše* theme) in sequences steadily closer to the home key of C major until the climax of the prelude is actually reached in bar 59:

the simultaneous combination of the themes of Libuše and Přemysl, symbolizing a marital union in which the happiness of the nation is decided (example 5).

The musical score for Example 4, Bedřich Smetana's prelude to *Libuše*, measures 35–43. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes staves for Ob. I II, Cl. I II B, Viol. I, Viol. II, Vle, Vlc, and Cb. The second system includes staves for Cor. III IV F, Viol. I, Viol. II, Vle, Vlc, and Cb. The music features a crescendo from piano (p) to fortissimo (ff) and then a decrescendo to pianissimo (pp). The key signature changes from one flat to two flats. The tempo is marked 'molto cresc.' and 'sub. dim.'

Example 4: Bedřich Smetana, prelude to *Libuše*, mm. 35–43

The rest would only be the musical expansion of this ideal state, were the removal of the tritone not restored at the end of the prelude (mm. 103 ff., example 6): A cadence leading to C major breaks off on the dominant seventh chord; the bass note *G* slips chromatically down to *F sharp* and carries the Libuše theme into the distant region of F-sharp major, as if that which is real had suddenly become phantasmagoria again. The music then darkens with F-sharp minor (mm. 109–110), only to return from there via D major and a double-dominant D major seventh chord (mm. 111–112) to the C major of the softly and delicately (*dolce*) entering fanfares (mm. 113 ff.). The turn from F-sharp minor to D major is encountered again at the end of the opera (act 3, mm. 1242–1243), precisely at the point where Libuše sees her prophetic visions blurred in the fog, but brings expression to her confidence that the Czech

Example 5: Bedřich Smetana, prelude to *Libuše*, mm. 59–61

nation will never perish. Is it an overinterpretation to claim that the final key of the opera, D major, by incorporating the erratic, phantasmagorical F sharp from the prelude as a third, relieves the tension that was still unresolved at the beginning in the closing apotheosis? Regardless, Smetana's precisely calculated F sharp major zone endows the C major ending of the prelude with a visionary moment that corresponds with *Libuše's* visions. Despite the ostentatious C major festivity, the music also communicates to the ears

of contemporaries that what is conjured up in tones is still to be realized politically.

Even the final bars remain ambivalent (mm. 128 ff., example 7): The Libuše theme is heard softly one last time in C major, but then points to F major or F minor by adding the minor seventh *B flat* (m. 129). Of these two options, F minor is realized first, with an almost catastrophic crashing gesture (m. 130); and yet immediately, almost violently, the minor third *A flat* is pushed upwards to the major third *A* in order to let the prelude end literally at the last second with a plagal cadence of F major → C major.

The musical score for Example 7, measures 95 to 100, is presented in two systems. The tempo is marked "rit. e molto Più lento" and the dynamics are "dim." and "pp".

System 1 (Measures 95-100):

- Fl. I II:** Measures 95-100. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Ob. I II:** Measures 95-100. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Cl. I II B:** Measures 95-100. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Fag. I II:** Measures 95-100. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Cor. I II C:** Measures 95-100. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Cor. III IV F:** Measures 95-100. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Trbe I II C:** Measures 95-100. Dynamics: *pp*.

System 2 (Measures 101-106):

- Viol. I:** Measures 101-106. Dynamics: *sempre f*, *pp*, *dim.*, *ppp*, *estinto*.
- Viol. II:** Measures 101-106. Dynamics: *sempre f*, *pp*, *dim.*, *ppp*, *estinto*.
- Vle:** Measures 101-106. Dynamics: *sempre f*, *pp*, *dim.*, *ppp*, *estinto*.
- Vcl. I:** Measures 101-106. Dynamics: *sempre f*, *pp*, *dim.*, *ppp*, *estinto*.
- Vcl. II:** Measures 101-106. Dynamics: *sempre f*, *pp*, *dim.*, *ppp*, *estinto*.
- Cb.** Measures 101-106. Dynamics: *sempre f*, *pp*, *dim.*, *ppp*, *estinto*.

Wagner. As the national undertones evoked by the name “Libuše” opens a space for imaginations that is filled musically without requiring a detailed “dramatic” program, the composer simultaneously predetermines his approach in the later symphonic poems of the *Má vlast* cycle. Describing the *Libuše* prelude as a key work in Smetana’s oeuvre is by no means overstating its value.

Table 1: Formal plan of the prelude to *Libuše*

Prelude	Harmony	Motives	Reference points in the opera
mm. 1–26	C major	Fanfares (“the assembly,” “holy judgment,” “law of the fathers;” compare with act 1, mm. 126–130: “Již hlas mě volá / do sboru hlav, / k svatému soudu / dle otcův práv!” (“The voice already calls me / to the head of the assembly / for holy judgment / according to the law of the fathers!”))	Act 3, mm. 421–446 (festive march)
mm. 26–35	C major	Libuše	[no exact correspondence]
mm. 35–59	C major → F-sharp major → C major	Libuše/Přemysl (signal-like fourth also act 2, mm. 667 ff.: “Heja!”)	[no exact correspondence]
mm. 59–61	C major	Libuše/Přemysl; simultaneous combination of both themes as apotheosis	Act 3, mm. 507–509 (festive march; also compare with act 1, mm. 917–919, here in A major)
mm. 61–70	C major	Libuše	[no exact correspondence]
mm. 70–74	C major → E-flat major	Transition to the fanfare before Libuše’s speech as judge: “Vy, kmeti, leši!” (“You elders, clan chiefs!”)	Act 1, mm. 495–498 (without modulation to E-flat major)

mm. 74–92	E-flat major → C major	Přemysl; variation on the love theme starting at m. 84; compare with act 2, mm. 641–643 (and frequently)	[no exact correspondence]
mm. 92–99	A minor → C major (emanating from a deceptive cadence V–VI in C major)	Libuše	Act 3, mm. 510–517 (festive march); also compare with act 1, mm. 921–925, here F-sharp minor → A major, emanating from a deceptive cadence V–VI in A major
mm. 99–113	C major → F-sharp major → F-sharp minor → D major → D major 7th → C major	Libuše	F-sharp minor → D major at the end of Libuše's vision, act 3, mm. 1242–1243): “[...] prokletí! Však necht' se stane cokoli [...]” (“[...] O cursed! But let happen what will [...]”)
mm. 113–132	C major	Fanfares/Libuše	[no exact correspondence]

Translated from the German by Rebecca Schmid.

A Coronation Opera against the Emperor: Bedřich Smetana's *Libuše* and the Political Power of Imagery

A purely aesthetic approach to opera does not lead anywhere. As has been discussed in research on music theater since the late twentieth century, the practical constraints of conditions for performing go hand-in-hand with a relativization of the work concept, which does not isolate the compositional core as the primary criterion of the theatrical event but instead integrates it into a network of social, political, moral, and economic intentions. The already considerable methodological challenge of shedding light on the conflictual situation as it relates to an individual production is further magnified by the fact that, over the course of time, the most diverse layers of reception—which are themselves bound by time—have been superimposed. Bedřich Smetana's Czech "Festive opera" ("Slavnostní zpěvohra") *Libuše* is a paradigmatic example of how intricate the phenomenon of opera can be in extreme cases. Smetana had initially intended this highly political stage work, completed in 1872, for celebrations to mark the coronation of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I as King of Bohemia. However, this event was canceled on short notice. Smetana's "Festive opera" was not premiered until ten years later for the opening of the Národní divadlo (National Theater) in Prague in 1881, which still bore political connotations.

This paper discusses *Libuše* against the backdrop of the historical context in which it was composed around 1870. The main focus is on the interplay between the aesthetic aspirations of the composer, who explicitly described *Libuše* as his most important work, and its political function. After an examination of both *Libuše's* conception and the crisis-ridden conditions of the Habsburg Empire around 1870, I look at the media resources through which political messages were proclaimed, particularly the targeted use of symbolically elevated tableaux, which by their nature refer far beyond the specific situation in Prague to a European practice characteristic of the nineteenth century. The fashion of "living pictures" (*tableaux vivants*), which enjoyed great popularity all the way up to the imperial family, will be considered as much as the symbolic overloading of Franz Joseph's coronation as King of Hungary in 1867, which was closely followed in Prague. For it is also the political power of imagery that left its mark on *Libuše*.

1. Smetana's *Libuše*

Smetana's *Libuše* is based on the tale of the legendary Bohemian princess Libuše; the librettist Josef Wenzig drew mainly on the "medieval" Grünberger and Königinhofer manuscripts, which were still considered authentic at the time but were actually forged by Václav Hanka in 1814.¹ The plot is clearly organized:

Act 1, "Libuše's Judgment" ("Libušin soud"):

1st Tableau (Vyšehrad) – Libuše is to administer justice in the inheritance dispute between the brothers Chrudoš and Štáhlav, who are at odds because of an intrigue by Krasava.

2nd Tableau (Vyšehrad, before the fortress) – Libuše decides that the brothers should divide the inheritance equally. Chrudoš refuses to accept the verdict of a woman, so Libuše agrees to marry. She chooses Přemysl as her husband.

Act 2, "Libuše's Wedding" ("Libušin sňatek"):

1st Tableau (rural area): Krasava's father demands that his daughter make amends for her injustice, so she apologizes to the brothers Chrudoš and Štáhlav for the intrigue and wins back Chrudoš's love.

2nd Tableau (lunch break during hay harvest): Přemysl dreams under a lime tree, then Libuše's emissaries appear and tell him that she has chosen him as her husband. Přemysl bids farewell to his village.

Act 3, "Libuše's Prophecy" ("Libušino proproctví")

1st Tableau (Vyšehrad): Libuše reconciles herself with Chrudoš and blesses his engagement to Krasava.

2nd Tableau (Vyšehrad): Přemysl takes his place on the throne next to Libuše, and the people cheer. Suddenly, Libuše sees a series of visions, all of which concern the future history of Bohemia. The prophecy ends with the words: "Czech people shall never perish, they all hell's horror will ever resist!"

1 Kelly St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana. Myth, Music, and Propaganda* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2017), 66–67. Regarding the manuscripts forged by Václav Hanka, see also John Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations. A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 94–96.

Maestoso ♩ = 60

The musical score is for the introduction of Bedřich Smetana's opera *Libuše*. It is marked **Maestoso** with a tempo of ♩ = 60. The score is written for a large brass and percussion ensemble. The first system (measures 1-5) includes Corni I II C, Corni III IV F, Trombe I II C, Trombe III IV C, and Tromboni I II. The second system (measures 6-10) adds Cor. II II C, Cor. III IV F, Trbe II II C, Trbe III IV C, Trbni I II, and Trbne III e Tb. The third system (measures 11-15) adds Timp. C, G. The score features various dynamics such as *ff*, *f*, and *più f*, and articulation marks like accents and slurs. Measure numbers 5, 10, and 15 are indicated at the top of their respective systems.

Example 8: Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše*, Úvod (Prelude), mm. 1–15²

2 Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše*, score, ed. Josef Bartoš (Prague: Orbis, 1951), 1–2.

The pre-Christian legend is musically realized in a manner that is stylistically indebted to the 1860s, but at times Smetana gives it a characteristic archaic touch, as the prelude, with its deliberate suppression of leading notes, makes clear. The exceptional position that Smetana accorded *Libuše* in his oeuvre is evident from the instrumentation of the wind section alone: 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba far exceeded the possibilities of the small Czech orchestra at the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater).³ The wind section begins with fanfares in C major, then in measures 7 to 14 there is initially a less firm deviation via the parallel tonic of A minor to the mediant E minor. As things develop, the return to C major is not reached via the dominant but merely via the subdominant F major (see example 8). Avoiding the leading tone, C major is confirmed from measure 12 forward solely via a C pedal point and a static C major chord. The representative fanfare motif becomes a sonic symbol of reign and will ultimately end the opera. Yet beyond that, as will be revealed at the end of this paper, even the static nature of the beginning exposes the core idea of the dramaturgical conception.

Stylistically, there is a clear affiliation with the sound world of the mid-nineteenth century, which Smetana was intimately familiar with as an opera conductor and composer. Moreover, his enthusiasm for Franz Liszt, which had developed at the latest since 1844 during lessons with Joseph Proksch in Prague, led to years of correspondence and more than one visit to Weimar.⁴ A comparative look at the work of the two composers shows that it was likely Liszt's exploration of harmonic boundaries within the framework of the repertoire and—especially with regard to *Libuše*—his examination of the relationship between image and music that fascinated Smetana.⁵ Liszt also paved Smetana's way to Richard Wagner. As the posthumous reception of Smetana has never tired of emphasizing, the Czech composer was enthusiastic about the idea of music drama. He studied printed scores, was present at Wagner's concerts in Prague and, while working on *Libuše*, travelled to Munich in July 1870 for the performance of *Rheingold* and *Walküre*—an experience about which he wrote to his wife, “The music is beautiful beyond

3 Concerning the size of the Czech orchestra in the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater) see in particular Bedřich Smetana, letter to Franz Neruda, October 3, 1869, Prague, in Bedřich Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 2 (1863–1874), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press; Prague: Národní muzeum, 2020), 269.

4 St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 26–29. Olga Mojžíšová, “Smetana a Shakespeare,” *Musicalia* 9, no. 1–2 (2017): 73–74.

5 Anno Mungen, “BilderMusik.” *Panoramen, Tableaux vivants und Lichtbilder als multimediale Darstellungsformen in Theater- und Musikaufführungen vom 19. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Filmstudien, 45) (Remscheid: Gardez!, 2006), vol. 1, 300–302.

all measure and must in time prevail everywhere. [...] All Czechs living here are ardent Wagnerians.”⁶

Despite his declared enthusiasm for Wagner, advanced harmony, and high ranking of musically adequate declamation—all parameters that are entirely in keeping with the New German School’s aesthetic—an interpretation of *Libuše* on the basis of music drama is misleading. Smetana defended himself against this short-circuit throughout his life, but without any success:⁷ “I consider *Libuše* [...] to be my most perfect work in the field of high drama, and I may say a completely *individual* work (weder Wagner noch Offenbach) [neither Wagner nor Offenbach].”⁸

Even though a composer’s statement should not be taken at face value and always be handled with utmost caution, it is worthwhile not to hastily label *Libuše* as a music drama but to work out the characteristics that run counter to the genre. From a musical point of view, these include a Lisztian compositional technique that specifically exploits the semantic connotations of melodic and harmonic elements with the help of flexible reminiscence motifs. This technique has little in common with a Wagnerian network of leitmotifs as claimed in *Oper und Drama*. On the level of the libretto, too, any analogy to music drama that would extend beyond the simple fact that the legend of the Bohemian princess is

- 6 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Bettina Smetanová, July 12, 1870, Munich, in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 2, 288–289 (emphasis in original): “Večir jsem byl v opeře ‘Wallküre’ od Wagnera. Lístek jsem dostal od intendance zdarma do parquetu. Ti páni mně to obstarali. Opera samma se mně nad míru libi a scenerie je velkolepá a omámující. Wallküry skutečně v oblacích na koních v gallopu přijedou, na skutečných živích koních s královské maršalle vypučených. Hudba je nad míru krásná a musí časem zvítězit všude. Vůbec tady je všude slyšet jen Wagnerovská hudba, – to by bylo něco tak pro pana Pivodu. Naše zde žijící Čechové jsou všickní zuřiví Wagnerianové.”
- 7 For the popular notion of *Libuše* as a Wagnerian music drama see Vladimír Karbusický, “*Libussa / Libuše*. The Mythical Symbol of Patriotism and its Role in Bohemian Opera Representation,” in *Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa: Mitteilungen der internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft an der Technischen Universität Chemnitz. Heft 3*, ed. Helmut Loos and Eberhard Möller (Chemnitz: Schröder, 1998), 150–176; Jiří Vysloulžil, “Smetanas musikalisches Festspiel *Libuše*. Geschichte und Kunst, Mythos und Politik,” in *Politische Mythen und nationale Identitäten im (Musik-)Theater. Vorträge und Gespräche des Salzburger Symposiums 2001* (Wort und Ton. Salzburger Akademische Beiträge, 54), ed. Peter Csobádi, et al. (Anif bei Salzburg: Müller-Speiser 2003), vol. 2, 739–749; St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 65–79. A notable exception to the usual Wagnerian interpretation of *Libuše* emerges in the essay by Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil, “Smetanas *Libuše*. Der tschechische Historismus und die Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Festschrift Heinz Becker zum 60. Geburtstag am 26. Juni 1982*, ed. Jürgen Schläder and Reinhold Quandt (Laaber: Laaber, 1988), 237–248.
- 8 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Ludevít Procházka, September 26, 1877, Jabkenice, in *Dopisy Smetanovy. Kommentovaný výbor šedesátičtyř mistrových dopisu*, ed. Karel Teige (Prague: Fr. A. Urbánek, 1896), 58: “*Libuši* [...] pokládám za nejdokonalejší práci v oboru vyššího dramatu a mohu říci za úplně *samostatné* dílo (weder Wagner noch Offenbach).”

reminiscent of the significance of the myth in Wagner fails.⁹ Since it is impossible to positively define an aesthetic by process of elimination, the question of what Smetana actually meant by a “Festive opera” becomes all the more urgent.

2. The Power of Imagery

If one steps back from the common verdict of *Libuše* as the best of Smetana’s eight completed operas (which can be traced back to Smetana himself) and takes a sober look at its conception, a peculiarity catches the eye. Although Smetana was highly experienced as a conductor and opera composer, had close contact to the influential poet Eliška Krásnohorská about the requirements of an appropriate libretto,¹⁰ and had an experienced librettist at hand with Josef Wenzig,¹¹ the dramaturgy of what he declared to be his most important work seems strange. The Smetana apologist Otakar Hostinský noticed the peculiar conception at once, admitting in an enthusiastic review of the premiere that in some places not even the “beauty of the music” succeeded in eliminating the consequences of the “great weaknesses of the libretto.”¹² First and most striking is the lack of dramatic tension.¹³

The only intrigue in the opera is limited to the secondary roles of Krasava and the brothers Chruďoš and Šťáhlav, whereas the unity of *Libuše*, Přemysl, and the Czech people is not questioned at any point. Strictly speaking, the drama has already come to an end with the reconciliation in act 2. If one also adds the completely undramatic framework for the plot—i.e., *Libuše*’s decision to marry

9 The only discussion of the libretto without reference to Wagner’s concept of myth can be found in Ottlová and Pospíšil, “Smetanas *Libuše*.”

10 See the extensive correspondence between Smetana and Krásnohorská in *Eliška Krásnohorská – Bedřich Smetana. Vzájemná korespondence*, ed. Mirko Očádlík, 2nd ed. (Prague: Topičova edice, 1940). Compare with Milan Pospíšil, “Bedřich Smetana as Viewed by Eliška Krásnohorská,” in *Bedřich Smetana 1824–1884. Report of the International Musicological Conference Praha 24th–26th May 1994*, ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Marta Ottlová (Prague: Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, 1995), 62–75.

11 For an introduction to Josef Wenzig, see Václav Petrbok and Jitka Ludvová, “Wenzig, Josef,” in *Hudební divadlo v českých zemích. Osobnosti 19. století*, ed. Jitka Ludvová (Prague: Academia, 2006), 618–621.

12 Em[anuel] Chvála, “Otevření Národního divadla,” *Dalibor* 3, no. 18 (June 20, 1881): 141: “[...] i krásy hudby nedovedou úplně odčinití velice škodlivý vliv velkých vad libreta.”

13 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Adolf Čech, July 4, 1882, Jakebnice, in *Dopisy Smetanovy*, 138 (emphasis in original): “Pro velké drama ale ten sloh nevystačí, protože je vzat a spojen s textem, který buď žádné tragické jádro nemá aneb ukazuje příliš na osudy obecného lidského života.” (“This style, however, is not sufficient for a grand drama because it is interlinked with a text that either has no tragic core or is too focused on the fate of *human life in general*.”) See also Ottlová and Pospíšil, “Smetanas *Libuše*,” 238–243.

the immediately willing Přemysl and make him ruler—the opera concludes with the general jubilation in the first scene of act 3. The very last scene and thus the end of the opera, of all things, falls completely outside the dramaturgical framework: Without any external cause, Libuše slips into a trance and sees as a vision five heroic eras in the future of Czech history, which flash up on stage one after the other as *tableaux vivants*. Following Jiří z Poděbrad, who was elected King of Bohemia in 1458, the image blurs into a fog, and Libuše sees “the royal castle in Prague in a magic illumination” (“Královský hrad Pražský v magickém osvětlení”) and prophesies that “my dear Czech people shall never perish, they all hell’s horror will ever resist!” (“Můj drahý národ český neskoná, on pekla hrůzy slavně překoná!”). In an apotheosis added to the libretto by Smetana himself, the chorus and ensemble echo Libuše’s last words to end the opera fortissimo.

That a *tableau vivant* tends to appear rather ridiculous to an audience today and therefore is hardly worth discussing for serious—let alone heroic—purposes¹⁴ obscures our view of the nineteenth century. What Smetana imagined for Libuše’s vision was in fact among the most popular offerings in media practice across social classes at the time.¹⁵ The re-creation of paintings with suitably disguised characters in *tableaux vivants* was not only one of the most lucrative attractions for showmen and theaters but also one of the most



Figure 4a: Gustav Gaul: *Reichstag zu Augsburg 1282*. King Rudolph I enfeoffs his two sons Albrecht and Rudolph with Austria, Styria, Carniola, the Windisch Margraviate and Portenau at the “Reichstag” in Augsburg, December 27, 1282. Watercolor, 1879 (© Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna)

- 14 A very rare exception with staged *tableaux vivants* in act 3 is the production of *Libuše* at the Národní divadlo (National Theater) in Prague, directed by Jan Burian (premiered on September 14, 2018).
- 15 Mungen, “*BilderMusik*.” Also see Bettina Brandl-Risi, *BilderSzenen. Tableaux vivants zwischen bildender Kunst, Theater und Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert* (Rombach Wissenschaften. Reihe scenae, 15) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2013); Birgit Jooss, *Lebende Bilder. Körperliche Nachahmung von Kunstwerken in der Goethezeit* (Berlin: Reimer, 1999).



Figure 4b: Crown Prince Rudolf I as King Rudolf I, Photograph, 1879 (© Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna)

popular forms of entertainment in salon culture, even well into the high aristocracy. In 1879, for example, Gustav Gaul's stylized scene with the legendary Habsburg Rudolph I, who had been crowned Roman-German King in 1273 and shortly afterwards defeated the Bohemian King Ottokar, served as the model for a carefully prepared *tableau vivant* with the Austrian Crown Prince Rudolf (figures 4a and 4b).¹⁶

There are countless examples of this type, so it is not surprising that the *tableau vivant* also found its way into opera. Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien* (*A Camp in Silesia*) should be mentioned here as a standard-setting example. The "Singspiel in three acts, in biographical pictures from the time of Frederick the Great" ("Singspiel in drei Akten, in Lebensbildern aus der Zeit Friedrichs des Großen") premiered on December 7, 1844, upon the reopening of the Berlin Opera House, which had burned down the previous year.

In direct correlation to the later *Libuše*, *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien* culminates in six *tableaux vivants* that evoke various stages of glory in Prussian history as scenic "dreams" ("Träume").¹⁷ Meyerbeer was aware that the opera could not be communicated in this form outside Prussia and found a remedy: While *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien* was performed dozens of times in Berlin over the course of the nineteenth century, it was received abroad solely in a heavily edited version without the *tableaux vivants* under the title *Vielka*.¹⁸ As Sieghart Döhring and Anselm Gerhard have pointed out, Meyerbeer, as Prussian general music director, was obliged to compose a new stage work about Prussian history for the rebuilt opera house on commission from the King.¹⁹ Sources verify that neither the opera as a whole nor the "living pictures" of *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien* were intrinsically driven by Meyerbeer. The case is quite different with Smetana, who himself was responsible for the conception of *Libuše* right up to the final *tableaux vivants*. But why was Smetana so keen to make the dramaturgy of his already barely dramatic opera ultimately undramatic with the final round of "living pictures"? This is where politics comes into play.

16 See *ibid.*, appendix, figures 59–61.

17 See Christoph Blitt, "Von der Belebung der Tableaux vivants. Zu den Schlussbildern von *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*, *Vielka* und *L'Etoile du nord*," in *Meyerbeers Bühne im Gefüge der Künste* (Meyerbeer-Studien, 4), ed. Sybille Dahms, et al. (Feldkirchen: Ricordi, 2002), 222–242.

18 See *ibid.*

19 Sieghard Döhring, "Zwischen kosmopolitischer Ästhetik und nationaler Verpflichtung: Giacomo Meyerbeer und seine Preußenoper *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*," *Studia musicologica* 52 (2011): 341–350: 343; Anselm Gerhard, "Schimärenhafte Dialoge. Donizettis *Lucia di Lammermoor*, König Friedrichs Flöte und Meyerbeers Dramaturgie der Dissoziation," in *Von Spontini bis Strauss. Hofkapelle und Hofoper Berlin im langen 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Detlef Giese, et al. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2022), 147–158: 152–154.

3. Smetana's Return to Bohemia

Smetana was not only an ambitious composer but also a thoroughly political figure. The interplay of material constraints, artistic ideals, and political discourse framed his work. In 1857, he admitted to Franz Liszt that he was in a much better financial position in Gothenburg than he had previously been in Prague,²⁰ at the same time complaining about the modest level of musical life there and closely following international events. Smetana worked in Sweden for five years and only moved back to Prague in May 1861.²¹ The moment when Smetana decided to return to Prague is telling: Following the federalist October Diploma of 1860, public life gradually developed and offered new artistic perspectives.²² The extent to which Smetana identified with the emerging Czech national question from the very beginning is documented not least in his decision in December 1861 as a native German speaker to maintain his diary, and eventually also his correspondence, exclusively in Czech.²³ Newly created musical positions within the newly founded Prague cultural association Umělecká beseda and, in particular, the new Prozatímní divadlo, offered financial prospects. Finally, Smetana's return was most likely motivated by the first composition competition for a Czech-language opera, organized by Count Jan Nepomuk Harrach.²⁴ The fact that Smetana had given up a materially secure position in Gothenburg to return to Prague was subsequently celebrated by his supporters as a purely patriotic act. As the influential musicologist and later Prague aesthetics professor Otakar Hostinský emphasized in his first performance review of *Libuše* in 1881, Smetana had given up his "comfortable position abroad" in order to "sacrifice himself with enthusiasm for national art."²⁵ In this reading, there was no mention of the artistic possibilities emerging in 1860s Prague that would have been unthinkable in Gothenburg.

The extent to which Smetana had indeed committed himself to the "Czech National Revival" in the 1860s is reflected in his increasingly harsh rejection of everything German. Thus he wrote—in German, *nota bene*—to a Swedish friend in 1864:

20 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Franz Liszt, April 10, 1857, Gothenburg, in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1, 91.

21 Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil, "Úvodem," in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1, *83.

22 Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 188–209.

23 Mojžíšová und Pospíšil, "Úvodem," vol. 1, *45.

24 St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 49.

25 O[takar] H[ostinský], "Smetanova 'Libuše'. Slovo k otevření Národního divadla," in *Dalibor* 3, no. 17 (June 10, 1881): 133: "opustil skvělé postavení v cizině, aby se s nadšením obětoval umění národnímu."

We *Czechs* of course stick together with *Denmark*, because should it, like us, fall victim to the great colossus Germania, and therefore, when speaking of Austria, I ask you to distinguish between Austria's *German* government and this side of German sympathies, and Austria's *non-German peoples*, who are nothing less than German-minded! – By the way, we can't wait to see what the future holds! – Until then, let us live fair art and enjoy what it yields.²⁶

Smetana not only clearly distanced himself from the “German peoples” of the Habsburg Empire, he even explicitly hoped for Denmark's victory against Austria, which was allied with Prussia during the Second Silesian War. Smetana's aversion to Austria grew steadily, so that he even welcomed the impending military escalation with Prussia in spring 1866:

We look forward to the war with Prussia, even if we must regret that our purely national aspirations will be halted for some time as a result. For the war will then direct all interest to itself, and everything else will remain in the background. Oh blessed Sweden, which already has everything it needs for happiness!²⁷

The Austrian crisis escalated rapidly and led to war against Prussia, the low point of which was the devastating Battle of Hradec Králové/Königgrätz on July 3, 1866. What the Austrian defeat meant for the everyday life of the Czech population is exemplified by Smetana, who fled the Prague apartment where he also taught and composed, and where Prussian officers took up quarters for months on end.²⁸ That the desolate situation was due to a war on Czech

26 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Isaac Philip Valentin, January 24, 1864, Prague, in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 2, 41 (emphases in original): “Wir Čechen halten es natürlich mit *Dänemark*, weil es, wie *wir* dem großen Kolosse Germania zum Opfer fallen soll, und daher bitte ich, falls von Österreich die Rede ist, wohl zu unterscheiden von Österreichs *deutscher* Regierung und dieser Seite deutschen Sympathien, und von Österreichs *nicht deutschen Völkern*, welche nichts weniger als deutsch gesinnt sind! – Übrigens ist Alles gespannt, was die Zukunft bringt! – Bis dahin leben wir der holden Kunst, und freuen uns ihrer Erzeugnisse.”

27 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Fröjda Benecke, April 3, 1866, Prague, in *ibid.*, vol. 2, 126: “Wir sehen dem Kriege mit Preussen freudig entgegen, wenn wir auch bedauern müssen, dass unsere rein nationalen Bestrebungen dadurch auf einige Zeit aufgehalten werden. Denn der Krieg absorbiert dann alles Interesse für sich, und alles Andere bleibt im Hintergrunde. Glückliches Schweden, das Alles bereits hat, was es zum Glücke braucht!”

28 See Bedřich Smetana, letter to Václav Starý, [prior to July 26, 1866], Nižbor, in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 2, 137–138; Bedřich Smetana, letter to Bettina Smetanová, September 1, 1866, Prague, in *ibid.*, vol. 2, 139–140.

soil caused by a dispute between Prussia and Austria over the north German Schleswig and Holstein, escalated Smetana's anger:

It remains eternally unforgivable that our government allowed the battlefield to be transplanted to *our* country, which was as alien to the dispute over Schleswig-Holstein as a newborn child. I don't even want to talk about the mistakes of our generals; they are already world-famous. [...] My family was in the country for the entire time that we were in the enemy's hands; I, on the other hand, was alternately in the city and in the country. *Nothing* was taught or learned. It all fled and hid when the enemy approached until we finally got used to it and quietly waited to see what would happen next.²⁹

4. The Coronation in Hungary 1867

The situation was no less unpleasant for Franz Joseph: Following the end of the German Confederation and the merger of Prussia with its allies in the North German Confederation (Norddeutscher Bund), Habsburg found himself thrown back to his own borders.³⁰ This immediately gave rise to a double demographic problem: First, the territory of Hungary made up more than half of the Habsburg territory and stretched from present-day Slovakia far into Carpathian Ruthenia (now Ukraine), and second, the Slavic peoples represented more than half the population of the empire. In this politically delicate situation, Franz Joseph decided with German liberal (and against Slavic) demands to recognize the Kingdom of Hungary.³¹ The emperor's position was so weakened that he finally had to restore the Hungarian constitution, which had been suspended since 1848, and acknowledge Hungary's political independence in a dual monarchy on equal footing with Austria. A signature would have sufficed, but—and this is where the political power of images again comes into play—the Hungarian deputies wanted more, insisting on a coronation to recognize the Emperor as

29 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Isaac Philip Valentin, October 7, 1867, Prague, in *ibid.*, vol. 2, 147–148 (emphases in original): “Unverzeihlich bleibt es ewig, daß unsere Regierung erlaubt hat, den Schauplatz der Kämpfe gerade in *unser* Land zu verpflanzen, welches dem Streite wegen Schleswig-Holstein so fremd war, wie ein neugebornes Kind. Von den Fehlern unserer Generäle will ich gar nicht reden, die sind schon weltbekannt. [...] Meine Familie war die ganze Zeit über, wo wir in Feindes Hand lagen, auf dem Lande; ich dagegen abwechselnd bald in der Stadt, bald auf dem Lande. Gelehrt und gelernt wurde *nichts*. Alles floh, und verkroch sich, wenn der Feind nahte, bis man ihn auch endlich gewöhnte, und ruhig abwartete, was weiter geschieht.”

30 Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 197.

31 *Ibid.*, 198–209.

King of Hungary. The highly symbolic enthronement of Franz Joseph, who had ruled over Hungarian territory as Emperor of Austria anyway, was a “coronation by the people’s mercy” as the *Gartenlaube* correspondent aptly put it:³²

And it was not a new revolution, not the sword that helped the Hungarian nation to regain the victory of its right but the persistent adherence to its right in a lawful political struggle; it was not internal armed force that forced the ruler of Austria to recognize this right, but the insight and conviction that only the restoration of the Hungarian kingdom would bring about peace with this nation and that only this peace would bring about the reinvigoration of the Austrian state. The Hungarians saw their shattered kingdom gloriously restored in Buda on June 8th, and therefore this great celebration was indeed a coronation of both the king and the people.³³

The coronation of Franz Joseph as King and Empress Elisabeth as Queen of Hungary on July 3, 1867, marked the physical recognition of a legitimate Kingdom of Hungary. As Judit Beke-Martos points out, this was by no means a mere spectacle but a constitutional authentication of the restored Hungarian territory.³⁴ The script followed a finely balanced dramaturgy in which traditional set pieces from earlier rituals were incorporated and the mythically inflated coronation regalia played a central role.³⁵ The relevance of the coronation’s legal dimension also manifests itself in the Archbishop of Esztergom’s placement of the legendary Matthias Crown on the Emperor’s head in the Matthias Church, not alone but together with the

32 H. v. C., “Eine Krönung von Volkes Gnaden,” *Die Gartenlaube. Illustriertes Familienblatt* 15, no. 30 (1867): 476–479: 476.

33 Ibid., 478: “Und nicht eine neue Revolution, nicht das Schwert hat der ungarischen Nation wieder zum Sieg ihres Rechts verholfen, sondern das beharrliche Festhalten an ihrem Recht in gesetzmäßigem politischem Kampf; nicht Waffengewalt im Innern hat den Beherrscher Oesterreichs zur Anerkennung dieses Rechts gezwungen, sondern nach furchtbaren äußeren Schicksalsschlägen auf sein Reich die Einsicht und Ueberzeugung, daß nur die Wiederaufrichtung des ungarischen Königthums den Frieden mit dieser Nation und daß nur dieser Friede die Neuerkräftigung des österreichischen Staatswesens herbeiführe. Die Ungarn sahen am achten Juni in Ofen ihr zertrümmert gewesenes Königthum glorreich wieder aufrichten, und darum bedeutet diese große Feier in der That zugleich eine Königs- und Volkskrönung.”

34 Judit Beke-Martos, “After 1848: The Heightened Constitutional Importance of the Habsburg Coronation in Hungary,” in *More Than Mere Spectacle. Coronations and Inaugurations in the Habsburg Monarchy During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Austrian and Habsburg Studies, 31), ed. Klaas Van Gelder (New York: Berghahn, 2021), 283–302.

35 See for example H. v. C., “Eine Krönung von Volkes Gnaden,” 478: “Keine Krone der Welt hat eine solche Bedeutung. ‘Nur der ist König von Ungarn, welcher mit dieser Krone gekrönt ist,’ steht ausdrücklich in den Grundgesetzen des Krönungsdiploms [...]” (“No crown in the world has such meaning. ‘Only he is King of Hungary who is crowned with this crown’ is expressly stated in the basic laws of the coronation diploma [...].”)

Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Count Andrassy. The fact that the former 1848 revolutionary Andrassy took on a leading role in the spectacle could hardly be surpassed in symbolic power.³⁶ This significance did not escape even the politically uninvolved Swiss envoy to Hungary, whose critical commentary Johann Jakob von Tschudi conveyed to the Swiss Federal Councillor Constant Fornerod:

It made a most peculiar impression to see the man [Andrassy] whose death sentence Emperor Franz Joseph had signed in 1849 and whose name was nailed to the gallows in Pest after eighteen years now placing the crown on the monarch's head [...].³⁷



Figure 5: "Der Schwertstreich auf dem Krönungshügel" ("The sword stroke on the coronation hill") in *Illustrierte Zeitung*, July 6, 1867 (© Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin)³⁸

- 36 See *ibid.* On the return of the amnestied Andrassy to Hungary in 1858 see Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 200; Beke-Martos, "After 1848," 293.
- 37 Johann Jakob von Tschudi, letter to [Constant] Fornerod, June 9, 1867 (Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv Bern), in Egon Caesar Conte Corti, *Mensch und Herrscher. Wege und Schicksale Kaiser Franz Josephs I. zwischen Thronbesteigung und Berliner Kongreß* (Graz: Styria, 1952), 395: "Es gewährte einen höchst eigentümlichen Eindruck zu sehen, wie der Mann (Andrassy), dessen Todesurteil Kaiser Franz Joseph 1849 unterschrieben hatte und dessen Name in Pest an den Galgen geheftet wurde, jetzt nach achtzehn Jahren die Krone auf das Haupt des Monarchen setzte [...]."
- 38 [Anon.], "Der Schwertstreich auf dem Krönungshügel," *Illustrierte Zeitung* 49, no. 1253 (July 6, 1867): 10–11. Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, Inv. no. ZB 20-491, Bibl.

But that was not all: the religious ceremony was followed by a double political oath that Franz Joseph had to swear on Hungary, the highlight of which was the “sword stroke on the coronation hill” (figure 5).

The newly crowned king had to ride onto a hill that had been symbolically heaped up with earth from all regions of Hungary and vow to protect the Hungarian people. What was supposed to appear as an archaic, timeless ritual actually consisted of countless (pseudo-) historical set pieces. The Swiss envoy commented: “Despite its splendour and true magnificence, the whole procession gave the uninvolved spectator the impression of a carnival (mummers’) pageant [...]. This piece of the Middle Ages does not fit into our time.”³⁹

Yet, it was the visual power of this *de facto tableau vivant* that lent the recognition of the Hungarian constitution a political reality that could never have been achieved simply by signing treaties. The affirmation functioned through the deliberate use of *tableaux vivants*, i.e., with the means of nineteenth-century popular culture. Ernst Marischka’s second *Sissi* film of 1956, in which the coronation ceremony was reconstructed with remarkable accuracy, bears eloquent testimony to this effective mode of action (Figures 6a and 6b).⁴⁰



Figure 6a: *Sissi, die junge Kaiserin* (*Sissi, the young Empress*), 1956 (directed by Ernst Marischka), film still (1:38:58): The coronation of Franz Joseph (Karlheinz Böhm) as King of Hungary with Gyula Count Andrassy (Walther Rheyer) and the Archbishop of Esztergom (N. N.)

39 Johann Jakob von Tschudi, letter to [Constant] Fornerod, June 9, 1867, 396: “Der ganze Zug machte trotz seiner Pracht und wirklichen Großartigkeit auf den unbeteiligten Zuschauer doch etwas den Eindruck eines Faschings(mummen)schanzes [...]. Dieses Stück Mittelalter paßt nun einmal nicht in unsere Zeit.”

40 *Sissi, die junge Kaiserin*, directed by Ernst Marischka, Austria 1956.



Figure 6b: *Sissi, die junge Kaiserin* (*Sissi, the young Empress*), 1956 (director: Ernst Marischka), movie still (1:42:03): Franz Joseph (Karlheinz Böhm) draws his sword and takes the oath as King of Hungary on the coronation hill in Buda

5. *Libuše*: *Tableaux vivants* as Political Manifesto

It should come as little surprise that Bohemians followed the bold recognition of the Hungarian constitution with utmost attention. The frustration over the settlement with Hungary was blatant: Although the Slavic peoples formed the majority in the Habsburg Empire, they were denied comparable political autonomy. What František Rieger, the moderate leader of the Czechs, denounced as an “unnatural injustice” gave the Czech national movement an enormous boost overnight. The once conciliatory mood was quickly overturned after 1867. In October 1869, at exactly the same time as he was working on *Libuše*, Smetana described the situation in stark terms to the cellist Franz Neruda:

You know what a hard fight our nation has had with the present government for its vested sacred right—namely, the right to independence of its crown—a government that would so like to lump *all* the nations of Austria into a single pot—that of Germanization—in order to be able to rule over all of them *avec beaucoup de plaisir*. – Thank God, our nation is fighting unbowed and as *one* man, *all* here in [Bohemia] as there in Moravia, 5 million Czechs, victory will and must be ours, and *soon*. Until then, let everyone remain at the post where he is; for now, during the battle, the arts are at rest, and *Prague* has

unfortunately become the place of battle, where nothing is known but—
battle.⁴¹

In view of the increasingly militant Czech demands, Franz Joseph finally agreed in September 1871 to his coronation as King of Bohemia in Prague.⁴² The aim was to recognize Bohemia's equality with Austria and Hungary, and to similarly underpin this in a pictorially powerful way as had been done in Hungary in 1867. The choice of resources seems characteristic: While a largely fictitious "Hungarian" ritual was staged on the coronation hill in Pest, the focus in Prague was on the opera. After the Czech national movement had formed under the roof of the planned Národní divadlo, the foundation stone of which had been laid in a demonstrative act in 1868 (Figure 7),⁴³ it was an obvious choice to transfer the highly symbolic stylization of its own history to the opera stage. Regardless of the fact that it was always the same Franz Joseph who wore the various crowns in personal union, everything revolved around paying homage to the king while at the same time rejecting the emperor. It was precisely for this purpose—for the Bohemian king but against the Austrian emperor—that Smetana set the premiere of his "Festive Opera" *Libuše*.⁴⁴

Its political functionalization ultimately explains the strange dramaturgy of *Libuše*. In order to demonstrate the sovereignty of Czech history in conformity with the coronation celebrations in Buda and Pest, the aesthetic principles of dramatic theory were less important: All that counted was the affirmative power of imagery. Under these conditions, the conception of *Libuše* appears in a different light. What begins as a "normal" opera with Krasava's intrigue in act 1 undergoes a continuous dissociation from historical opera to political manifesto via the undramatic plot around Libuše and Přemysl up until the

- 41 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Franz Neruda, October 3, 1869, Prague, in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 2, 269 (emphases in original): "Sie wissen welch' harten Kampf unsere Nation um ihr verbrieftes geheiligtes Recht – das Recht der Unabhängigkeit ihrer Krone nämlich – mit der jetzigen Regierung zu kämpfen hat, einer Regierung, welche *alle* Nationen Österreichs so gerne in einen einzigen Topf – den der Verdeutschung – werfen möchte, um so avec beaucoup de plaisir über Alle herrschen zu können. – Gottlob, unsere Nation kämpft ungebeugt und wie *ein* Mann, *Alle* hier in [Böhmen] wie dort in Mähren, 5 Millionen Če[chen,] der Sieg wird und muß unser sein, und zwar *bald*. Bis dahin bleibe Jeder auf seinem Posten, wo er ist; denn jetzt während dem Kampfe ruhen die Künste, und *Prag* ist leider die Stätte des Kampfes geworden, wo man jetzt nichts kennt, als – Kampf."
- 42 For the imperial rescript of September 12, 1871 see Karel Tůma, *Královský reskript ze dne 12. září 1871 a jeho význam pro naše státní právo* (Prague: Jos. R. Vilímek, 1913).
- 43 See Michaela Marek, *Kunst und Identitätspolitik. Architektur und Bildkünste im Prozess der tschechischen Nationsbildung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), 151–158.
- 44 See Ottlová and Pospíšil, "Smetanas *Libuše*," 238.

prophecy in the last scene. In contrast to Meyerbeer's *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*, the *tableaux vivants* are not simply appended, but rather the result of a large-scale dramaturgical process that leads to the tearing down of the "fourth wall" in terms of theater aesthetics. While the audience initially follows only a symbolically charged but thoroughly operatic legend, it is addressed directly in the final speech and merges with the "Czech people" on stage. That precisely this point forms the conceptual core of *Libuše* is also revealed by the fact that Smetana, despite financial hardship and complete deafness, refused to release *Libuše* in its original form or even adapt it for standard repertoire to his death in 1884.⁴⁵ In a letter to Čech, he explains, "*Libuše* is not an opera according to old custom, but rather a solemn tableau, a musical-dramatic awakening to life."⁴⁶

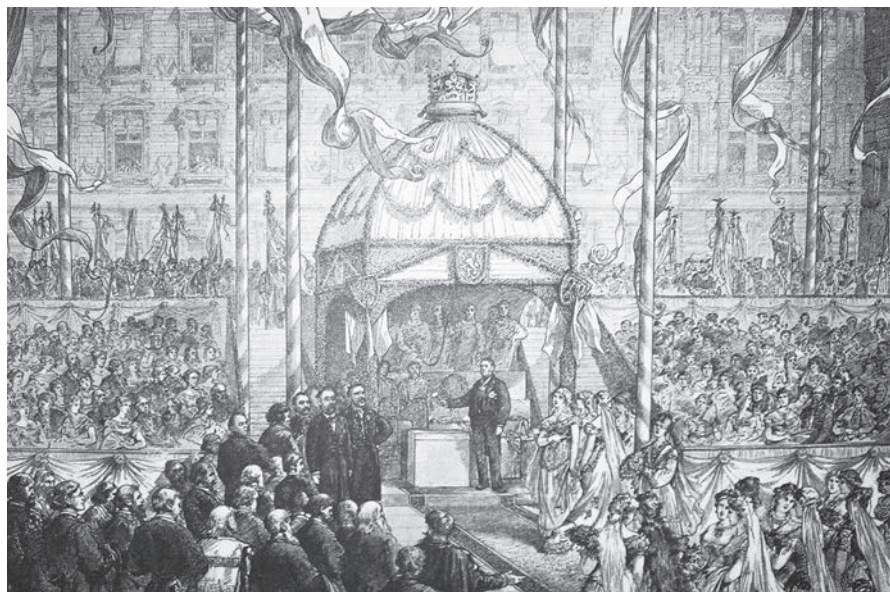


Figure 7: Laying of the foundation stone of the Národní divadlo (National Theater) on May 16, 1868 (standing front, third from the right: Bedřich Smetana)⁴⁷

- 45 For Smetana's refusal of changes to *Libuše*, see his letter to Adolf Čech, January 2, 1881, Jabkenice, in *Dopisy Smetanovy*, 109; he explained in a subsequent letter to Adolf Čech (April 1, 1881, Jabkenice) that changes to the comic operas were possible, however. In *ibid.*, 110. Also see Přemysl Pražák, *Smetanovy zpěvohry* (Prague: Vydavatelství Za Svobodu, 1948), vol. 2, 164–165.
- 46 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Adolf Čech, August 17, 1883, Jabkenice, in *Dopisy Smetanovy*, 153 (emphases in original): "*Libuše* není žádná *opera* dle starých zvyků, *nýbrž je slavné tableau, hudebně-dramatické uživotnění*."
- 47 František Adolf Šubert, *Národní divadlo v Praze. Dějiny jeho i stavba dokončená*, 2nd ed. (Prague: J. Otto, 1883), copperplate print.

However, a problem arose when the coronation in Prague was canceled on short notice due to pressure from German liberals and Hungarians, and the necessary political context for the premiere of *Libuše* was lost.⁴⁸ Smetana had to wait an entire decade for the next comparably politically significant event: the opening of the Národní divadlo in June 1881. The opening of the Národní divadlo with *Libuše* was postponed until crown prince Rudolf visited Prague with his newlywed wife Stephanie, demonstrating the importance of the Austrian imperial family witnessing the manifestation, not only the “Czech people.”⁴⁹ The crown princess excused herself, so only Rudolf attended the premiere in the royal box, which was thoroughly adorned with Bohemian symbols.⁵⁰ Although the crown prince was known to have a preference for *tableaux vivants*, he took his leave after the first scene of act 2, precisely at the point in the performance when the historicist opera began to transform into a political manifesto for Bohemia and against Austria.⁵¹ Whether or not this is coincidence, one can gather that Rudolf understood the message.

Translated from the German by Rebecca Schmid.

48 On the failure of a Bohemian solution in 1871 see Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire. A New History* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2016), 295–299; Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 208.

49 Pražák, *Smetanovy zpěvohry*, vol. 2, 147–148.

50 On the national symbolism of the building and furnishings of the Národní divadlo, see Marek, *Kunst und Identitätspolitik*, 79–320, on the ornaments of the royal box, 272–280.

51 [Anon.], “Korunní princ v Národním divadle,” in *Národní listy* 21, no. 141 (June 12, 1881): 2. I thank Milan Pospíšil for pointing out this newspaper article to me. Also see Pražák, *Smetanovy zpěvohry*, vol. 2, 156.

Musical Screenshots: When Music and Imagery Go Hand in Hand—Smetana's Music for *Tableaux Vivants*

On New Year's Eve in 1862, while Bedřich Smetana was at work on the opera *Braniboři v Čechách* (*The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*), the puppet show *Doktor Faust* was performed to entertain the members of the newly founded *Umělecká beseda* (Art Association). Smetana had written a chamber music overture for the occasion, probably as a friendly gesture, and noted in his diary, "We were celebrating New Year's Eve, and I had written an overture to the Pimperl comedy *Faust* for the occasion, which aroused general merriment. Unfortunately, I wasn't there in person that night; I was sick."¹ The overture to *Doctor Faust* was not the first composition that Smetana had written for puppet theater. His friend, the writer Jan Neruda, recorded in his publication *Meister Smetana erzählt* (*Words from Master Smetana*)—probably referring to Smetana's time in Pilsen, from 1840 to 1843:

My classmates apparently suffered me gladly and saw to it that I had homework. I only had to copy down the lessons. In return, I sang entire scenes and arias from various operas for them somewhere in a classmate's private apartment or played them fragments from Kopecký's Pimperltheater at school. I understood splendidly how to mimic marionets. I can allow myself this self-praise.²

- 1 František Bartoš, *Smetana in Briefen und Erinnerungen* (Prague: Artia, 1954), 85: "Wir feierten Silvester und ich hatte zu diesem Anlass eine Ouvertüre zur Pimperlkomödie *Faust* geschrieben, die allgemeine Heiterkeit erregte. Leider war ich diese Nacht nicht persönlich dabei; ich war krank [...]" The Austrian term "Pimperl" means something small in a slightly derogatory way; something that requires no effort.
- 2 Ibid., 21: "Meine Mitschüler mochten mich nämlich ganz gerne leiden und besorgten für mich meine Aufgaben. Ich brauchte die Lektionen nur abzuschreiben. Dafür sang ich ihnen irgendwo in der Privatwohnung eines Mitschülers ganze Szenen und Arien aus verschiedenen Opern oder spielte ihnen gleich in der Schule Bruchstücke aus Kopeckýs Pimperltheater vor. Marionetten nachzuahmen, das verstand ich prächtig. Dieses Eigenlob darf ich mir gestatten [...]"

Following his arrival in Prague from Gothenburg in May 1861, Smetana became conductor of the *Hlahol* choral society, began work on the opera *Braniboři v Čechách*, opened a music institute with Ferdinand Heller, and became politically active. His compositional focus shifted to opera, the art form that was best suited for capturing the process of national emancipation in the cultural sphere. *Braniboři v Čechách*, completed in 1863, was premiered on January 5, 1866, and *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) had its premiere on May 30 of that same year. The following September, he became the first music director (Kapellmeister) of the Czech Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater), a position he held until he went deaf in 1874. From 1863 to 1870, he was chairman of the music department of the aforementioned *Umělecká beseda*, from 1865 to 1869 he was conductor of the Philharmonic Concerts, and he was a music critic for the newspaper *Národní listy* from 1864 to 1865.

The intensity of Smetana's public engagement and his enormous workload during this period manifested themselves in the volume and focus of the music he composed. This was the phase "in which Smetana sought a professional and existential anchor and at the same time gradually created a position for himself in Prague's cultural life with numerous, wide-ranging activities."³ It is hardly surprising that his catalogue of compositions from this time is relatively small, as his professional duties interfered with his time for composing. His financial situation also did not allow him to compose just for the sake of it. It appears that he had little talent as a self-promoter when dealing with publishers and, therefore, hardly any works were published. In the 1860s, both as a conductor and as a composer, Smetana was dedicated to the stage, and thanks to these activities, he "soon became one of the most prominent personalities in Prague musicians' circles."⁴ Against this backdrop, he created two short overtures for puppet theater based on texts by Matěj Kopecký.⁵

3 Introduction in Bedřich Smetana, *Korespondence/Correspondence*, vol. 2 (1863–1874), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press; Prague: Národní muzeum, 2020), *98.

4 Ibid., *100: "[...] bald zu einer der markantesten Persönlichkeiten in Prager Musikkreisen."

5 Matěj Kopecký (1775–1847): Bohemian puppeteer.

1. The Two Overtures for Marionette Theaters

The tradition of marionette theater in Bohemia extends back to the early Middle Ages.⁶ It quickly spread throughout Europe, performed by traveling troupes to entertain people at fairs and festivals. Puppet theater became a beloved art form that was not only used to tell stories but also to deliver political and socially critical messages. The first documented puppet show in Bohemia dates to 1666 and was performed by an Italian troupe. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the dramatic texts of these puppet shows proved their value in communicating with the common people, becoming “the bearer of ideas on national rebirth and a disseminator of the Czech language.”⁷ During the eighteenth century, puppetry became increasingly popular and was considered an integral part of Bohemian culture. Puppeteers used marionettes, rod puppets, and string puppets to invent their own stories and develop unique characters. Matěj Kopecký ranks as the father of Bohemian marionette tradition: In 1797, he was the first to be granted a license to operate “optical and mechanical presentations.”⁸ Following compulsory service in the army from 1789 to 1809, he worked as a watchmaker, traveling salesman, and road worker. Although Kopecký was not the only Bohemian puppeteer, he became the best known in the second half of the nineteenth century, as his son successfully published his plays in 1862. Therefore, it appears to be no coincidence that Smetana wrote the overture to a marionette theater work by Kopecký in exactly that year.

The opening music composed by Smetana for the performance of *Doktor Faust* on New Year’s Eve 1862 was written for piano, strings, percussion, bass trombone, and horns. Presumably the composer would have played the piano part himself had he not been absent due to illness, as we have seen.⁹ His friend, the Bohemian violinist and conductor Mořic Anger (1844–1905), stepped in for him. Considering that the overture was composed for a closed room, one can assume that there was limited space for the musicians, and so it seems plausible that the piano reinforced the solo strings. The overture to

6 Alice Dubská, *Czech Puppet Theatre Yesterday and Today* ([Prague]: Arts and Theater Institute, 2019), 9: “The roots of Czech puppet theatre run deep into the early Middle Ages. At that time, in the lands that are now considered the Czech Republic and Central Europe, many different kinds of puppets were part of pagan customs, traditions and religious rituals, as well as being forms of entertainment.”

7 Jindřiška Pátková, *Das tschechische Puppentheater* (Prague: Nationalmuseum, 1975). (reprint 2000).

8 See Lucie Drahoňovská, *Ausstellung “Die böhmische Marionette” auf der Prager Burg*, <https://deutsch.radio.cz/ausstellung-die-boehmische-marionette-auf-der-prager-burg-8068711> (access date: March 1, 2023).

9 See footnote 1.

Doktor Faust begins with a short, dramatic introduction that breaks off after only a few measures. After a grand pause, the cello enters on a low C, which is sustained for an unusually long time (example 9).

Example 9: Bedřich Smetana, *Doktor Faust*, mm. 19–27

From this low tone, a short fugue—which, as the most intellectual form of counterpoint, probably represents the scholar Doctor Faust—subsequently develops. Why this note, which is the beginning tone for the fugue’s head motive, is sustained for so long does not (yet) become clear based on the score alone. Only in the following section are there indications about the interplay of the music and the first scene of the puppet theater. Over an eight-measure passage of the solo piano (mm. 49–56) is written “Hlas z pravé strany” (voice from the right side), and over another eight-measure passage of solo trombone (mm. 59–66), “Hlas z levé strany” (voice from the left side). These stage directions correspond with indications that are found in Kopecký’s script. Here the voice from the right says to Faust, “Fauste, odeber se do školy ‘teolokyje’” (“Faustus, go to the school of theology”) and the voice from the left, “Fauste, zanech té školy teolokyje, uposlechni rady mé a dej se do školy ‘elekramantiky’” (“Faustus, leave this theology school, listen to my advice and attend the school of ‘electronics’”).¹⁰ One deducts that Faust’s introductory

10 Václav Kopecký, *Komedie a hry Matěje Kopeckého: dle sepsání jeho syna Václava*, ed. E. Just et al. (Prague: 1862), 112.

monologue must have been spoken over the sustained cello tone. Smetana's overture is thus the underscoring of a melodrama rather than a mere introduction.

The overture behaves similarly in the puppet play *Oldřich a Božena* (John Tyrrell described it as a "delicious mock-serious overture"¹¹), which was performed on New Year's Eve the following year. *Oldřich a Božena* is a three-act comedy based in the broadest sense on well-known figures from the story of Božena of Bohemia, a legend that first appears in the *Chronica Boemorum*, written between 1119 and 1125 by the chronicler Cosmas of Prague. A two-bar opening is followed by four bars which the strings fill out with accompanying figures in the keys of C–G–G–C. Above this, the horns hint at a melody (example 10).

This sequence is repeated three times, and the melody hinted at in the horns is augmented with clarinets. Here, too, the meaning of the music is revealed when one reads along with Kopecký's script. In the second scene, the character Petr enters and sings a song: "Nevím ve světě žádného, aby byl vždýcky bez práce; lenoch se věku nedočká, on zahyne vám na krátce" ("I know no one in the world who is always unemployed; a lazy person never gets old; for he will die in a short time").¹² Smetana's music, designated as an "overture" yet offering little melodic substance apart from written-out harmonies and figurations, is instead likely to be incidental music for Petr's song. It is not clear which melody was sung, but the typical folk song harmonies I–V–V–I are so omnipresent that many melodies fit to them. The final bars are in pure C major and evoke a rustic musical atmospheric picture, perhaps that of rural farm life.

These two compositions, while designated as overtures, raise questions and appear unusual in some musical respects, revealing themselves as more than mere musical preludes. Smetana, who had a marked sense for musical drama, used them to create short melodramas. Considering the available means and likely also the abilities of the musicians involved, Smetana composed pragmatically but effectively. Puppet theater was not something unusual in Smetana's everyday life but rather was part of his daily reality, as revealed by the anecdote above. And although the puppet theater overtures are somewhat peculiar in Smetana's catalog of works, they are not unique in music history. In Smetana's geographical and temporal surroundings, František Škroup, Karel Bendl, Antonín Dvořák, and many other renowned composers also composed music for puppet theater. Among other things, they expanded the musical repertoire for puppet theater in the nineteenth century, and their compositions contributed to the cultural significance of puppet shows in Bohemian society.

11 John Tyrrell, *Czech Opera* (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), 128.

12 Kopecký, *Komedie a hry Matěje Kopeckého*, 34.

Allegro moderato 5

Clarineti I II in C

Corni I II in C

Tromba in C

Timpani C, G

Allegro moderato

Violini I

Violini II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabbasso

10

Cl. I II C

Cor. I II C

Trba C

Timp. C, G

Viol. I

Viol. II

Vla

Vlc.

Cb.

Example 10: Bedřich Smetana, *Oldřich a Božena*, mm. 1–12

2. More Than a Favor: Music for *Tableaux Vivants* as Studies for the Big Picture

Although known since antiquity, the origins of modern *tableaux vivants* can be traced back to the sacred drama of the Renaissance, when allegorical images were often re-enacted.¹³ These involved “pictorial representations in which the characters either represent an image or a vision in immobile poses, or mime something connected with the drama in a silent scene.”¹⁴ The contradiction in terminology has often been discussed in theater studies:

If one considers that immobility is an essential part of the *tableau vivant*, the question of the adjectival component *vivant*/living in the programmatic title of this piece of performance art becomes all the more urgent. Animation without movement? [...] *Tableaux vivants* in theater performances, for example, were only characterized by a brief lack of movement, which never lasted long enough for the spectator to lose sight of the action of the respective play.¹⁵

Early forms of *tableaux vivants* can be found, for example, in the tragedies of Andreas Gryphius, who calls them “visions” that grant us insights into the future or anticipate the outcome of the plot.¹⁶ In *Carolus Stuardus* (1656), for example, prophetic ideas in the last act reveal to us the consequences of the king’s execution. In this tradition, *tableaux vivants* most often display visions and imagined circumstances, situations unknown to the actors on stage such as prophetic warnings. This dramaturgical idea manages to convince through its visual composition, as *tableaux vivants* rely heavily on the staging. Actors dressed in elaborate costumes and posing in carefully arranged formations create an image reminiscent of a painting, with every aspect of the tableau—including the positioning of the actors, lighting, props, and backgrounds—contributing to the message. The decisive factors are, according

13 Gilbert J. Jordan, “Lebende Bilder im deutschen Drama des 17. Jahrhunderts,” in *The South Central Bulletin* 33 (1973): 207–210, 208.

14 Ibid., 207.

15 Johanna Barck, *Hin zum Film – zurück zu den Bildern. Tableaux Vivants: ‘Lebende Bilder’ in Filmen von Antamoro, Korda, Visconti und Pasolini* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 21: “Bedenkt man, daß die Bewegungslosigkeit zum Tableau vivant wesentlich dazugehört, so stellt sich in diesem Kontext die Frage nach der adjektivischen Ergänzung *vivant*/lebend in der programmatischen Betitelung dieser Performanckunst umso dringlicher. Verlebendigung ohne Bewegung? [...] So waren zum Beispiel die Tableaux vivants der Theateraufführungen nur durch eine kurze Bewegungslosigkeit gekennzeichnet, die nie so lange andauerte, als daß der Zuschauer die Handlung des jeweiligen Stücks aus den Augen verloren hätte.”

16 Jordan, “Lebende Bilder im deutschen Drama des 17. Jahrhunderts,” 209.

to Bettina Brandl-Risi, reiterative presentation, recognizability, legibility, and standardization of image; emphasis; and increased visibility.¹⁷ The temporal effect of the *tableaux vivants* is peculiar: The actors sink into a rigid state and stare into the void, becoming *personae* of artificiality and life that has come to a halt.

As an integral part of the theater, *tableaux vivants* were usually positioned backstage behind a curtain; when the curtain was raised the scene would appear like a picture in a frame. In the semi-public sphere, they have been successful parlor games since the nineteenth century, when dressing up in costume and striking poses became a leisure activity. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809) popularized *tableaux vivants* in performance practice. The art form spread to bourgeois salons and became part of courtly festivities but also an integral part of theater performances.¹⁸ They became a playful pastime and were most popular between 1830 and 1920. A group of characters from literature, art, or history were positioned on stage. After the curtain opened, the models remained silent for a few minutes, presenting themselves to the audience, often accompanied by a poem or music. The multidimensional and multisensory set-up created a unique atmosphere and had a strong emotional impact on the viewer. The popularity of *tableaux vivants* can be attributed to several factors, as they offered a form of entertainment that was both educational and artistic: the audience could learn about history and literature while at the same time enjoying a visual spectacle. With the rise of cinema, however, *tableaux vivants* began to lose popularity, and people were no longer content with still images, preferring the excitement of movement and sound that films could provide.

In a letter of February 12, 1869, Countess Elisabeth Kaunitz invited Smetana to discuss his initial ideas for a concert to collect funds for the completion of the St. Vitus Cathedral at Prague Castle:

I am counting on our long-time friendly relations as I turn to you with the request // to be of assistance to me in a musical (and national) matter. And so I ask you to make your way to me tomorrow morning at half past ten so that we can discuss further || This step does not bind you to anything, as you can accept or decline at your discretion; but if I know

17 Bettina Brandl-Risi, *BilderSzenen. Tableaux vivants zwischen bildender Kunst, Theater und Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert* (Rombach Wissenschaften. Reihe scenae, 15) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2013), 12–25.

18 Ibid.

you, I believe that you will be very interested and devoted to the matter;
just as much as || your ever loyal || Countess Kaunitz.¹⁹

Countess Kaunitz was a prominent personality and keen patron of the arts in Prague who was involved in various philanthropic activities, including sponsorship of numerous artists, writers, and musicians. In her palace, she organized salons and gatherings where intellectuals, artists, and aristocrats came together to exchange ideas or attend performances. Smetana must have accepted the Countess's invitation, as he subsequently composed music for the event. Two *tableaux vivants* were initially planned: *Libuřin soud* (*Libuř's Judgement*) and *Romeo a Julie* (*Romeo and Juliet*), based on a painting owned by the countess.²⁰ Of the original plan, however, only *Libuřin soud*, drafted by Antonín Lhota, was performed, preceded by a *tableau* from *Prodaná nevěsta*, and *Rybář* (*The Fisherman*) after a poem by Goethe, staged by Viktor Barvitius. According to Brian Large, so many tickets were sold before the first performance that a second had to be added for the following day.²¹

Smetana conducted the orchestra of the Prozatímní divadlo at both performances. The *Prodaná nevěsta* *tableau* did not survive but must have been an arrangement of the best-known melodies from the 1866 eponymous opera. The scores for the other two *tableaux*, however, are extant.

As seen in example 11, *Rybář* is scored for strings, harp, and harmonium. From the depths of the cellos and double basses arises a wave-like motion, which is picked up by the violas and violins. There is no doubt that Smetana was inspired by the first lines of Goethe's ballad for these approximately 100 measures of music: "Das Wasser rauscht, das Wasser schwoll, ein Fischer saß daran [...]" ("The water rushed, the water swelled, on it sat a fisherman [...]"). The music does not provide anything more, for it accompanies a visual moment. Brian Large describes *Rybář* as follows:

[It] is an insignificant piece of hack-work [...]. Long-held pedals are firmly anchored on E flat over which a limpid figuration floats upwards from double basses to violins, with horns and harmonium filling in arpeggios,

19 Elisabeth Kaunitz, letter to Bedřich Smetana, February 12, 1869, Prague, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 239: "Auf unsere alten freundlichen Beziehungen rechnend wende ich mich an Sie mit der Bitte // mir in einer musikalischen (nationalen) Angelegenheit behülflich zu sein. Und so bitte ich Sie morgen um halb 11 Uhr vormittags zu mir kommen zu wollen wo wir das Nähere besprechen würden || Dieser Schritt bindet Sie an gar Nichts da Sie annehmen oder abschlagen können nach Gutdünken; aber wie ich Sie kenne glaube ich daß Sie mit großem Interesse der Sache zugehen [zugetan] sein werden; eben || so sehr wie || Ihre ganz ergebene || Gfin Kaunitz."

20 See Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 240.

21 Brian Large, *Smetana* (London: Duckworth, 1970), 211.

immediately suggesting the opening of *Das Rheingold*. Unfortunately, the piece never establishes itself as anything more than an accompaniment [...] and the result is a pleasant but undistinguished piece of jobbery. The score is remarkable only inasmuch as it anticipates a watery atmosphere returning five years later in the tone poem *Vltava*.²²

What sounds disparaging in the words of Large is, in fact, exactly what this music intends. Because the score accompanies a *tableau vivant*, it is likely that Goethe's ballad was recited before or even during the music. A comparison with the prelude to Wagner's *Rheingold* is, while obvious, difficult because the opera was not premiered until September 22, 1869, six months after the performance of *Rybář*. As Smetana never met Wagner and first traveled to Munich to see the opera in July 1871, it is hardly conceivable that he had access to the *Rheingold* score, especially as it was not published until 1873. While it is possible that Smetana had learned about this peculiar opening in static E-flat major from those who had heard the opera before him, the alleged similarity is probably coincidental.

Allegro comodo ♩ = 60

The musical score is for the first seven measures of Bedřich Smetana's *Rybář*. It is written for a string ensemble. The tempo is **Allegro comodo** with a quarter note equal to 60 beats. The key signature is E-flat major (three flats). The time signature is 8/8. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-4) includes Violini I, Violini II, Viole, and Violoncelli. The second system (measures 5-7) includes Violini I, Violini II, Viole, Violoncelli, and Contrabassi. The Viole part is marked *con sordini* and *p*. The Violoncelli part is marked *I. [div.]* and *II.* with *p*. The Contrabassi part is marked *p*.

Example 11: Bedřich Smetana, *Rybář*, mm. 1–7

22 Ibid.

In contrast to the chamber music setting of the first *tableau vivant*, Smetana scored *Libuřin soud* for a large symphonic orchestra, and the gesture of the music is solemn and dignified. Topoi such as trumpet fanfares and plagal endings with the minor subdominant lend the piece a sacred, almost archaic character. The printed score bears the subtitle “Hudba k živému obrazu podle básně Rukopisu Zelenohorského” (“Music for a *tableau vivant* based on a poem from the Zelenohorský manuscript”). The Zelenohorský/Grünberger manuscript, which was said to date back to the eighth or ninth century and contains, among other things, *Libuřin soud* in Old Bohemian language, was allegedly found at Zelená Hora Castle in 1817 and, for several decades, was considered the oldest manuscript in Bohemia. Although leading philologists were quick to declare it a forgery, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk did not prove it definitively until 1886. At the time of the creation of Smetana’s incidental music and the opera *Libuře*, the opinion still prevailed that the document was genuine. Large describes *Libuřin soud* as follows:

[It] is on a much higher plane. From the opening it is obvious Smetana was fired by the patriotic theme, the imperious nature of the legendary and sibylline Princess of Bohemia and though the music furnished an excellent background for the charitable entertainment of Prague’s nobility, it provided far more for the composer.²³

The two works do differ considerably in their level of workmanship even though they were performed for the same occasion. Assuming that Smetana met with Countess Kaunitz to discuss the undertaking on February 13, 1869, as she had requested, there only would have remained two months to compose and rehearse the three works. And he would not have had much time considering his other activities as a music teacher and conductor. It seems that the music for *Libuřin soud* was already available, as Smetana had begun composing the opera *Libuře* that same year. The other two works may therefore have been lesser in scope and detail due to lack of preparation time.

The performances were a success with Prague society and also paid off for Smetana: “In all, ten thousand gulden were raised, and for his participation Smetana received twenty gold coins from Count Thun and a canteen of silver cutlery from the Countess Kounic.”²⁴ It was not only Smetana’s music, but also the fact that *tableaux vivants* were a popular social pastime, that contributed to this success. People participated either as actors or spectators, leading to an intermingling of otherwise rather separate social classes. It is known that

23 Ibid., 211–212.

24 Ibid., 211.

Smetana's second wife, Bettina, took part in the *tableau* for *Libuřin soud*, and it is quite possible that Countess Kaunitz, one of the initiators, also played a part.²⁵

The widespread use of *tableaux vivants* in the domestic realm is documented by the large number of printed instructions for creating living pictures, such as Edmund Wallner's publication *Vierhundert Sujets zu lebenden Bildern* (*Four hundred subjects for tableaux vivants*) of 1870.²⁶ Yet they attain their most effective impact on the audience when embedded in a stage work, where they can create a rupture in the linear progression of time, exaggerate meaning by making emotions and moral states clearly visible, or encourage contemplation: "The tableau vivant acquired its appeal exclusively through the physical imitation of painting, for it is intended to astonish the audience by functioning like a painting while at the same time deploying live bodies."²⁷ *Tableaux vivants* can act as an impressive dramatic element on various levels, such as during scene changes, where they provide a creative means of transitioning. They can also serve as a reference and provide insight into the historical or cultural context, or be used to heighten the symbolism of a scene, thus contributing to intellectual debate as a form of artistic expression. In opera, *tableaux vivants* are to be distinguished from other *tableaux* such as opulent final scenes with or without ballet, for in contrast to the latter, they can foreshadow something or display a piece of narrative (whereby allegorical stylization endows them with additional meaning). As such, they have a more intense, dramatic effect than a traditional final chorus used to summarize. There are two striking *tableaux* in Smetana's operas:

- *Dalibor* (1868): In the fifth scene of act 2, Dalibor sleeps in the dungeon. Zdeněk (a person who does not otherwise appear in the opera but whose death set the plot in motion) appears in a dream and plays the violin. It is a memory of that which has happened previously.
- *Čertova stěna* (*The Devil's Wall*) (1882): In the first scene of act 2, Rarach, the devil, makes an image of the unhappy Katuška appear, reinforcing Jarek's inner struggle and explaining his actions. At the same time, it informs the audience of the phase reached in the events that are unfolding simultaneously.

25 The social and entertaining character is underlined by the following episode, which also shows that classes could mix during such productions: "On 27 January 1821, while Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia (later Czar Nicholas I) and his wife were visiting the Prussian court in Berlin, the royal pair participated in a series of *tableaux vivants* and pantomime scenes after Thomas Moore's oriental fantasy tales in verse, *Lalla Rookh*." Thomas S. Grey, "Tableaux vivants. Landscape, History Painting, and the Visual Imagination in Mendelssohn's Orchestral Music," *19th-Century Music* 21 (1997): 38–76: 38.

26 Edmund Wallners, *Vierhundert Sujets zu lebenden Bildern* (Erfurt: Bartholomäus, 1870).

27 Barck, *Hin zum Film – zurück zu den Bildern*, 22.

Smetana and his librettist Josef Wenzig go a step further in the festive opera *Libuše*, composed from 1869 to 1872 and premiered in 1881.

3. Enhancing the Drama: The Use of *Tableaux Vivants* in *Libuše*

Libuše was intended as a coronation opera for Emperor Franz Joseph I as King of Bohemia and was completed in November 1872, but because the Habsburg Emperor cancelled the coronation at short notice, it was not premiered as planned. Smetana kept the opera sequestered for nine years, only allowing a few friends to see the score, so that it could be available for a festive occasion of special import. The opera was ultimately premiered on June 11, 1881, for the opening of the newly built Národní divadlo (National Theater) under the baton of conductor Adolf Čech. Smetana himself had described *Libuše* (the original German libretto was translated into Czech by Ervín Špindler) as “a solemn tableau, a musical-dramatic awakening to life.”²⁸ It narrates the legend of Princess Libuše and the emergence of the Bohemian ruling dynasty of the Přemyslids, culminating in the heroine’s prophetic visions at the end of the third act.

Smetana was not the first composer to take an interest in the subject matter of *Libuše*. The origins of the legend extend far back into Czech history. One of the earliest references is found in the aforementioned eleventh-century *Chronica Boemorum* by Cosmas of Prague, which is the most important source on the formation and development of the Bohemian territory. A version translated into German by the chronicler Václav Hájek z Libočan in the sixteenth century made the material known far beyond the borders of Bohemia. As mentioned, the manuscript found at Zelená Hora was considered genuine in Smetana’s time, and philological discussions in the years following the document’s appearance kept the *Libuše* material alive in the consciousness of authors and composers.

At the end of act 3 of the opera *Libuše*, Smetana deploys *tableaux vivants* to heighten the solemn action. After Přemysl has declared his will to be judge and prince to the people and has settled the fraternal dispute between Chrudoš and Štěhlav, Libuše’s gaze wanders into the distance, at which point her visions appear, prophesying a glorious future for the nation. *Libuše* acts here as a narrator and interprets the images, leading us from one to the next. The sections in the third act that are clearly labelled as “images” in the score are the following:

28 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Adolf Čech, August 17, 1883, Jabkenice, in *Dopisy Smetanovy. Kommentovaný výbor šedesátičtyř mistrových dopisu*, ed. Karel Teige (Prague: Fr. A. Urbánek, 1896), 153 (emphasis in original): “je slavné tableau, hudebně-dramatické uživotnění.”

1. “Břetislav a Jitka” (Prince Břetislav and Jitka)
2. “Jaroslav ze Šternberka” (Knight Jaroslav of Šternberk/Sternberg)
3. “Ottokar II., Eliška a Karel IV.” (King Ottokar II, Elisabeth and Karl IV)
4. “Žižka, Prokop veliký a Husité” (Žižka, Prokop the Great and the Hussites)
5. “Jiří z Poděbrad” (Georg of Poděbrady/Podiebrad)
6. “Královský hrad pražský v magickém osvětlení” (The Royal Castle of Prague in magical lighting)

Each vision deploys different thematic material and is colored by a different instrumentation. The fifth *tableau* is dominated by the Hussite chorale “Ktož jsú boží bojovníci” (“Thou who are God’s warriors”), which is also important in the symphonic poems *Tábor* and *Blaník* from the cycle *Má vlast*. In the score, Smetana prescribes exactly when the curtain should be raised for the *tableau* and when it should drop again. The entire sequence of *tableaux vivants* is at a standstill in terms of action and reflection:

The opera scene thus tends towards imagery in that it fixates the action in the situation in which an interesting musical-dramatic affect is aroused and begs for performance. In the standstill of the apparent stage action, in the pausing of the dramatic characters in dynamic poses expressing the situation that has arisen, a fleeting, real-life moment manifests itself and is captured. The music lends it the illusory duration necessary for the performance, for singing out inner experience. And in this moment, when the opera enters its actual dramatic realm, a “speaking” configuration—a “tableau vivant” peculiar to it—is created on stage.²⁹

The *tableaux vivants* concretize and visualize Libuše’s words, giving dramatic meaning to and elevating the narratives of the historical or mythical content already familiar to the Czech audience. The music is “extraordinarily intertextual, with quotations of medieval hymns and Hussite chorales intermingled with

29 Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil, “Oper und Spektakel im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Die Musikforschung* 38 (1985): 1–8: 2: “Die Opernszene tendiert somit darin zur Bildlichkeit, daß sie die Handlung in der Situation fixiert, in der ein musikdramatisch interessanter Affekt sich erregt und zur Darbietung drängt. In dem Stillstand der augenscheinlichen Bühnenaktion, in der Verharrung der dramatischen Personen in dynamischen, die entstandenen Situation ausdrückenden Posen, manifestiert sich die Festhaltung eines flüchtigen, realen Augenblicks. Die Musik verleiht ihm die zur Aufführung, zum Aussingen des inneren Erlebnisses notwendige irrealer Dauer. Und in diesem Moment, wo die Oper in ihren eigentlichen Bereich des Dramatischen tritt, kommt auf der Bühne eine ‘sprechende’ Konfiguration, ein ihr eigentümliches ‘tableau vivant’, zustande.”

motives from earlier in the opera itself.”³⁰ These are sensual illusions that impact the audience and, if performed correctly, have a multi-sensory effect.

4. The Significance of Capturing the Dramatic Effect in Musical Imagery

In opera, *tableaux vivants* are pictures in music but also music in pictures. Anno Mungen points out that the French term *tableau* should be understood in its original sense, namely as a “pane” or “panel” and not in the translation “painting” that is most commonly used today.³¹ In theater, *tableau* refers to the set design, the relationship between decorations and props; the performers then embody the adjective *vivant*. The simultaneous presentation of music and image in the opera creates an antagonistic relationship: static image versus music moving through time. Depending on one’s preference, they are either images set to music or music that is illustrated. A change experienced by the theater starting at the beginning of the eighteenth century was expressed aesthetically on stage because “the action became more and more visually comprehensible.”³² Yet the content must be known for a *tableau vivant* to produce its multi-sensory effect. In Smetana’s music for puppet theatre, *tableaux vivants*, and the final images of the opera *Libuše*, it almost seems as if a natural genesis were the driving force behind the compositions. What they have in common, however, is the fact that they are music for scenes in standstill, revealing Smetana’s sense for imagery. The circumstances and inspiration for the *tableaux* could not be more different, but whether it was a composition created for an occasion in a private space or a large-scale scene for an opera, they always emphasize the importance of the moment as a creative device for the scene.

In the opera *Libuše*, *tableaux vivants* reinforce the narrative and arouse emotions in the audience, bringing iconic moments to life on stage. And it is particularly true of opera that the capturing of a fleeting, real-life moment manifests itself in the standstill of the apparent stage action. The music lends the moment the illusory duration necessary for the performance of the inner experience. The *tableau vivant* can narrate part of the opera’s story, i.e., replace the narrative with the visible, whereby the allegorical stylization lends it

30 Brian S. Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague* (Rochester and New York: University of Rochester, 2006), 169.

31 Anno Mungen, ‘BilderMusik’: *Panoramen, Tableaux Vivants und Lichtbilder als multimediale Darstellungsformen in Theater- und Musikaufführungen vom 19. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Filmstudien, 45) (Remscheid: Gardez!, 2006), 99.

32 Ibid.

additional meaning.³³ *Tableaux* therefore heighten emotion and are a dramatic effect, especially for summarizing final scenes. The power or effectiveness of the image appeals to anyone who knows how to read them, for images are often stronger than words. Smetana's motivation for composing the opera *Libuše* may have been the impending royal coronation, but may also have had been shaped by the popular uprisings after 1868. Thanks to this historical and mythical background but also the declaration of the opera as a festive opera and its overall dramaturgical structure, the opera has been susceptible to reinterpretation. It was interpreted and instrumentalized politically in diverse ways, and thus was revisited on many occasions during the establishment of the Czech state after 1918 and continues to be endowed with new perspectives into the present today.

Through repetition and contextualization, images can also become “places of remembrance” (“lieux de mémoire”).³⁴ The term “place” is to be understood in a figurative sense and not necessarily geographically, and it can manifest itself in different ways, such as a song, a poem, or an object. The *tableaux vivants* in the opera *Libuše* in particular serve as images of what has been, of a past reality, and it is expected that they reflect an external reality more directly than language or text, thus decisively shaping historical consciousness.³⁵ Smetana's operatic aesthetics not only reflect the cultural climate of his time, but also his personal artistic vision, which include musical authenticity, an emphasis on musical heritage, national identity, intense drama, but also extra-musical symbolism. Smetana was aware of the importance and impact of imagery and knew how to put music at the service of the visual. He was a master of evoking images and emotions through music—be they musical trifles or works of national import.

Translated from the German by Rebecca Schmid.

33 Ottlová and Pospíšil, “Oper und Spektakel im 19. Jahrhundert,” 6.

34 Pierre Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998).

35 Edgar Wolfrum and Cord Arendes, *Die Macht der Bilder*, <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/presse/ruca/ruca06-2/8.html> (access date: March 16, 2023).

No Regrets? Krásnohorská's *Vlasta* as a Libretto (Not) for Smetana

Hypothetical scenarios in the history of music—imagining what might have ensued if certain projects had been completed—are often alluring, though ultimately fruitless exercises for the historian. For example, at one crucial point in Bedřich Smetana's career, he hoped to compose a sequel to his fourth opera *Libuše*, even before the Národní divadlo (National Theater) was completed, and we might have had at least a pair of music dramas, or perhaps even a larger cycle, based on epic legends of early Bohemia. In late January 1871, as work on *Libuše* was nearing completion, he was determined to set Eliška Krásnohorská's recently completed libretto, *Vlasta*, as his next opera. It would have been their first collaboration, and the project might have altered the course of Smetana's compositional career, were it not for a small roadblock. Krásnohorská had already given the libretto to her brother-in-law, the Plzeň/Pilsen based composer Hynek Palla (1837–1896), who had begun his sketches and refused to relinquish it, even to the most prestigious Czech composer of his time. In one of her earliest extant letters to Smetana, Krásnohorská writes of the unfortunate circumstance, closing with the comment that he would “not regret” missing out on the chance to compose *Vlasta*.¹ Nevertheless, both Smetana and Krásnohorská seem to have done precisely this: regretted the circumstance for some years afterwards.

The *Vlasta* libretto manuscript survives complete in the Palla estate papers as three distinct drafts: the first two written one atop the other in the same document, and a separate third draft dated substantially later.²

- 1 Eliška Krásnohorská, letter to Bedřich Smetana, January 19, 1871. Reprinted in *Eliška Krásnohorská – Bedřich Smetana: Vzájemná korespondence*, ed. Mirko Očadlík, 2nd ed. (Prague: Topičova edice, 1940), 25–27. A larger portion of this letter is quoted later in this chapter. All translations in this chapter are my own.
- 2 Both documents, as well as a portion of Palla's score, are housed in the Plzeň Municipal Archive (Archiv města Plzně), hereafter AmP. The older document containing the V1 and V2 drafts bears the title *Vlasta. Velká romantická opera ve 3 jednáních. Dle pověsti národní* [sic], AmP sig. LP 5883 81/34. Since V1 is a fair copy, we may presume that at least one

The first extant version (hereafter V1), a fair copy from approximately 1869, takes a strong stance on women's rights from the outset, which is developed over a three-act drama of epic proportions. Each subsequent revision (V2, overtop of V1; and the later V3) retains many passages intact, but also shortens or replaces some text for a greater sense of musico-dramatic cohesion. Naturally, V2 has a rough, sketch-like quality, squeezed into the margins or between lines, or pasted over the more legible V1 draft. The V3 draft, ostensibly a fair copy of V2, also contains new edits, but is written in a cramped, older hand of deteriorating clarity. Through comparison of these drafts, we gain perspective into Krásnohorská's creation and revision process, foreshadowing—and eventually following—her more famous librettos for Smetana (figure 8).

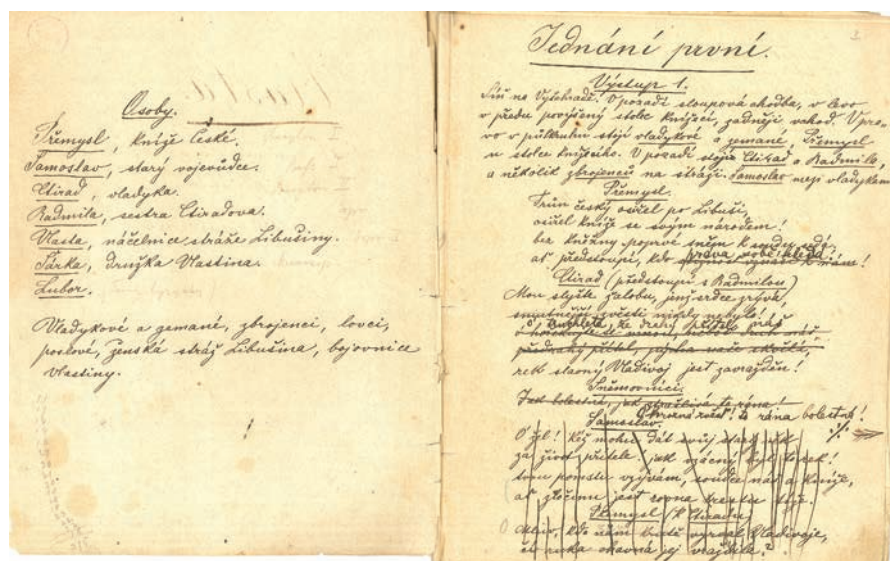


Figure 8: Eliška Krásnohorská, *Vlasta*, act 1, scene 1, V1 fair copy with V2 text overlay

1. Krásnohorská's Path to *Vlasta*

For opera composers in the late nineteenth century, choosing a libretto subject was no small task, and Smetana in particular is known to have consulted many options to ensure a certain quality of intellectual and artistic collaboration. Embattled as he was after the premiere of *Dalibor* in 1868, these decisions

earlier draft may have existed. The V3 document is titled *Vlasta. Velká romantická opera ve 3 jednáních. od Elišky Krásnohorské* [sic], AmP sig. H 2696 XXVIf/8/27. As discussed below, the V3 title page bears the date of May 25, 1897.

carried tremendous weight for Smetana as a highly public cultural leader in the early 1870s. Entering into a partnership with Krásnohorská, a twenty-three-year-old woman with just one successful libretto and one critical failure to her name,³ was a bold risk, but as we have come to appreciate since, theirs had all the hallmarks of a deep creative kinship.

The career of Eliška Krásnohorská (1847–1926) as a librettist began close to home, and it reveals much about the strong personal bonds of her family's social circle. Born as the fourth child and second daughter of Ondřej and Dorota Pech, she was raised in a solidly middle-class family with strong connections to the Czech national revival and its intellectual and artistic offshoots.⁴ After her father's death in 1850, when Alžběta Pechová (as she was then known) was just three years old, leadership of the family's fortunes fell at first to Dorota, and then progressively spread to include the oldest siblings, brothers Jindřich and Adolf Pech, who studied music and art, respectively. By her middle teenage years, Alžběta was contributing to the family income with modest publications under her now-famous pen name, Eliška Krásnohorská. The siblings' multiple talents brought artists of all types to the family salon (or "beseda") evenings, which always included music led by budding composer Jindřich Pech, his sisters Juliana, Eliška, and Bohdanka as vocalists, and the young composers Karel Bendl and Hynek Palla as regular fixtures.⁵ Notably, Smetana attended at least one Pech family beseda at Jindřich's invitation, resulting in a brief collaboration with then-seventeen-year-old Eliška on the translation of "a few duets by Schumann."⁶

3 Karel Bendl and Eliška Krásnohorská's opera *Lejla* had its successful premiere on January 4, 1868. Their second collaboration, *Břetislav*, premiered on September 18, 1870, and prompted a heated exchange between Krásnohorská and August Wilhelm Ambros in the press. See August Wilhelm Ambros, "První provozování Bendlovy opery Břetislav," in *Čtení o Elišce Krásnohorské. V bojích o Smetanu, Hálka a Minervu*, ed. Libuše Heczková (Prague: Institut pro studium literatury, 2015), 22–26.

4 One of the most comprehensive biographies can be found in Drahomíra Vlašínová, *Eliška Krásnohorská* (Prague: Melantrich, 1987). See also Brian S. Locke, "Eliška Krásnohorská and Czech Operatic Historiography: Reconciling the Paradox of Women's Authorial Voices," in *Women in Nineteenth-Century Czech Musical Culture: Apostles of a Brighter Future*, ed. Anja Bunzel and Christopher Campo-Bowen (London: Routledge, 2024), 63–82; and Libuše Heczková, "Slečna kritik – Eliška Krásnohorská," in *Píšíci Minervy: Vybrané kapitoly z dějin české literární kritiky* (Prague: Filosofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2009), 35–164.

5 Krásnohorská provides numerous descriptions of the Pech family beseda in her memoirs, e.g., Eliška Pechová-Krásnohorská, *Z mého mládí* (Prague: Vaněk a Votava, 1920), 153–177.

6 Eliška Pechová-Krásnohorská, *Co přinesla léta: Druhé knihy vzpomínek svazek II*, ed. Ferdinand Strejček (Prague: Vaněk a Votava, 1928), 7: "[...] několik dvojzpěvů od Schumanna." Neither Krásnohorská nor her subsequent biographers ever identify these compositions by name.

Of all these potential musical partners, it was Bendl who secured Krásnohorská's first libretto for the four-act opera, *Lejla*.⁷ Its success in 1868 under Smetana's baton at the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater) prompted a flurry of interest from composers within and beyond the Pech family beseda. By this point, Hynek Palla was now her brother-in-law, having married Juliana Pechová in 1866 and moved to Plzeň, where Jindřich, Eliška, Bohdanka, and their mother soon joined them. The precise chronology, titles, or even existence of Krásnohorská's Plzeň librettos is difficult to trace, however (see table 2). Completed texts came to Bendl (*Břetislav*), Palla (*Jedibaba*, *Vlasta*), and Smetana (*Lumír*, presumed lost, and *Sebastian a Viola*); further projects were proposed for each of the above, as well as for Jindřich Pech, František Skuherský, and Karel Šebor.⁸ Of these, only Bendl's *Břetislav* became a fully orchestrated opera that premiered in 1870. The musical numbers of Palla's *Jedibaba* survive in partial full and vocal scores in the Palla estate papers, held by the Plzeň Municipal Archive;⁹ Krásnohorská's spoken dialogues for this two-act comedy do not appear to be extant, nor is there any known performance history. The Plzeň archive also contains the extant *Vlasta* libretti discussed in the present chapter, a short musical excerpt of Palla's score,¹⁰ and an early libretto draft for a mysterious third, untitled opera. This last item has heretofore been mislabeled as the libretto of *Jedibaba*, but comparison of its contents reveals this not to be the case.¹¹ (Nor is it *Kassandra*, yet another missing Krásnohorská libretto often cited in connection with Palla.) In table 2, this unnamed libretto appears as *Komická opera ve 3 jednáních* (Comic opera in three acts), its title-page incipit. Its plot bears marginal resemblance to certain features of *Tajemství*, which Krásnohorská would write for Smetana some years later.

7 The opera was revised and republished in a five-act version in 1874.

8 Lists of possible, but not extant, libretti appear variously in multiple secondary sources: see Lenka Kusáková, "Krásnohorská, Eliška," in *Hudební divadlo v českých zemích: Osobnosti 19. století*, ed. Jitka Ludvová, et al. (Prague: Divadelní ústav – Academia, 2006), https://encyklopedie.idu.cz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1017:krasnohorska-eliska&catid=14&lang=cs&Itemid=300 (accessed September 12, 2023). See also Vlašínová, *Eliška Krásnohorská*, 126 (which erroneously lists *Ježibaba* [sic] as intended for Jindřich Pech); and Otakar Šourek, "Z libretistických začátků Elišky Krásnohorské," *Venkov* 21 (December 25, 1926): 1–2.

9 The vocal score comprises all the musical numbers of both acts, without dialogues: Hynek Palla, *Jedibaba: klavírní výtah a hlasy*, AmP sig. H 2721 XXVIf/8/52. The full score of act 1 only is a fair copy: Hynek Palla, *Jedibaba. Komická zpěvohra ve 2 jednáních*, AmP sig. H 2641 XXVIe/13/5.

10 Hynek Palla, *Úvod a scéna ze zpěvohry Vlasta. III. jednání*, AmP sig. H 2651 XXVIe/14/1. The women's choral parts are copied into a separate document, AmP sig. H 2651a XXVIe/14/1a; see discussion below.

11 *Komická opera ve 3 jednáních*, AmP sig. H 2694 XXVIf/8/25.

Table 2: Krásnohorská's libretto projects prior to *Hubička*

Title (acts) [Translation]	Composer	Libretto date	Completion status (premiere date)
<i>Lejla</i> (4; 5)	Bendl	1866; with later revisions	Two completed versions of score (1868; 1874)
<i>Jedibaba</i> (2)	Palla	1866–1867	Piano-vocal score completed; act 1 orchestrated; spoken dialogues not extant
<i>Komická opera ve 3 jednáních</i> (3) [Comic opera in three acts]	Palla	?	Libretto sketch (prose)
<i>Valdštýnova první láska</i> [Wallenstein's First Love]	Bendl	?	? Libretto suggestion
<i>Poklad</i> [The Treasure]	Bendl	?	? Libretto suggestion
<i>Žena Vršovcova</i> (3) [The Vršovec Wife]	Bendl	1868	? Possible early version of <i>Břetislav</i>
<i>Jaroslav ze Šternberka</i> [Jaroslav of Šternberk]	Skuherský	1868	? Libretto suggestion
<i>Vodník</i> [The Water-Goblin]	Pech	?	? Libretto suggestion
<i>Kassandra</i>	Palla	? 1869	? Libretto possibly complete; never composed
<i>Břetislav</i> (5)	Bendl	1869	Complete (1870)
<i>Vlasta</i> (3)	Palla	1869; with later revisions (to 1897)	Libretto complete; score incomplete
<i>Lumír</i>	Smetana	1870	Libretto complete; never composed; not extant
<i>Sebastian a Viola/Viola</i> (3)	Smetana	1871; with later revisions	Libretto complete; piano-vocal score and score incomplete (fragments, 1924)
<i>Královský spor</i> [The Royal Dispute]	Šebor	1873–1874	? Libretto suggestion

<i>Pěvec volnosti</i> (1) [The Freedom Singer]	Pech	1874	Text complete; never composed; text published 1874 as “Dramatic poem”
<i>Blaník</i> (3)	Fibich	1874	Complete (1881)

Because their complete correspondence is not extant, it is difficult to know when precisely Krásnohorská began writing libretti with Smetana in mind; the overlap of *Lumír*, *Sebastian a Viola*, and *Vlasta* is rather tangled. We can consider *Vlasta* in this context because, in her letter of January 19, 1871, she implies that it was written with Smetana in mind, though the oft-cited date of its first draft as 1869 predates her direct correspondence with the composer. In any event, Krásnohorská gave *Vlasta* to Palla, who—despite the various machinations described by the librettist herself—retained it and occasionally returned to his sketches for it until his death on July 24, 1896. What we can surmise is that Smetana had heard of *Vlasta*’s existence around the time she had completed *Lumír*, by October 1870, when negative reviews of *Břetislav* prompted her to request it back from Smetana for revision;¹² how he heard about *Vlasta* is pure conjecture, most likely from Bendl, Pech, or Krásnohorská herself. What we can document is her response:

I regret that I cannot provide you with *Vlasta*: it was already completed and given to the composer before you graced me with the invitation to write a libretto for you. I would have loved to see it in your hands, but it is no longer possible. Besides, *Vlasta* has such a brooding, even dreadful quality, and then—its first scene is a *judgment* [scene], without which the plot is impossible to imagine; you will not regret it.¹³

This passage is striking for several reasons. First, its phraseology is typical of the self-effacing, yet assertive tone in which Krásnohorská wrote to her elders, such as Karolina Světlá.¹⁴ Secondly, as Mirko Očadlík noted, Smetana may have already discussed with her his growing discomfort with judgment scenes, after composing

12 Eliška Krásnohorská, letter to Bedřich Smetana, October 10, 1870, reprinted in *Eliška Krásnohorská – Bedřich Smetana*, 20–21.

13 Eliška Krásnohorská, letter to Bedřich Smetana, January 19, 1871, reprinted in *ibid.*, 26 (emphasis in original): “Lituji velice, že Vám ‘Vlastou’ posloužit nemohu; byla již dříve ukončena a skladateli odevzdána, než jste mě poctil vyzváním, bych pro vás libreto napsala. Přála bych si ji vidět v rukou Vašich, ale není již možno. Krom toho má ‘Vlasta’ taktéž zádušný, ba strašlivý ráz, a pak – první její scéna jest *soud*, bez něhož si děj ten nelze pomyslit; nebudete ji tedy asi mnoho litovati.”

14 See, for example, Eliška Krásnohorská, letter to Karolina Světlá, 1873, in Karolina Světlá, *Z literárního soukromí II. Vybrané spisy Karoliny Světlé*, vol. 8, ed. Josef Špičák (Prague: SNKLHU, 1959), 420; quoted in Vlašínová, *Eliška Krásnohorská*, 135.

those of *Braniboři v Čechách*, *Dalibor*, and *Libuše*.¹⁵ Perhaps most intriguingly, it implies that, even before his request, Krásnohorská's ideal composer for *Vlasta* had been Smetana.

Krásnohorská later added to this story in her memoirs, though these are certainly a heavily curated source of information:

Already in 1871, the maestro asked me to write him the libretto for his next opera. He was just then working on *Libuše*, that most beloved daughter of his Muse, and after finishing this ceremonial opera he wished to have another libretto from pagan legends just like *Libuše*, to which it would cohere in plot and style as a free-standing continuation—perhaps as the central member of a trilogy he dreamed about; he wanted the heroine of the new opera to be *Vlasta* with her powerful defiance and with the whole wild, tragic quality of the Maidens' War.¹⁶

She then mentions her excuse of having already offered *Vlasta* “to a relative” before continuing, this time in Smetana's voice:

“And has your relative already started composing?” the maestro asked with very lively interest. “He has,” I answered, and the maestro, pensive for a moment, said with as much gracious sympathy as only he was capable, “Your relative is gifted, I know a few of his compositions, and I would not want to place any sort of barrier in the path of a young composer that he has daringly embarked upon. Don't say anything to him, but it will all work itself out in my favour. Your relative will soon be convinced that he will not get anywhere with the opera, for an opera will not be written as easily as a song and your relative is perhaps still lacking a lot of study and preparational work. You will see that your relative will set his efforts aside, and then your *Vlasta* will fall to me, yes? [...] I would ask that before you revise *Vlasta* for me, you get to know *Libuše*, on whose music I wanted to impress the character of the Czech pagan Middle Ages, and the very same Czech national

15 Očadlík supports his claim with Smetana's rejection of Otakar Hostinský's libretto *Konrad Wallenrod* for the same reason: “I honestly wouldn't know to set a judgment musically, for it still to be [something] new.” (“Já už bych na mou věru nevěděl, jak hudebně odsuzovat, aby to zase bylo nové.”) *Eliška Krásnohorská – Bedřich Smetana*, 24.

16 Pechová-Krásnohorská, *Co přinesla léta*, vol. 2, 20: “Již r. 1871 poprvé mě mistr požádal, abych mu napsala libreto ku příští jeho opeře. Měl právě pod pérem svoji ‘Libuši’, tuto nejmilejší dcery [sic] Musy své, i přál si, aby po ukončení slavnostní té zpěvohry měl připraveno libreto také z bájí pohanských, jako Libuše [sic], k ní se vízící dějem i slohem jako samostatné její pokračování, – snad jako střední část trilogie, o které možno že snil; přál si, aby rekní nově opery byla *Vlasta* s mohutným svým vzdorem a s celou divokou tragikou dívčí války.”

feeling leads me to the choice of *Libuše* and *Vlasta* as subjects, just as the German feeling of Richard Wagner [led him] in the choice of old German legends.”¹⁷

Much of this quotation, a seeming conversation between the author and Smetana recalled more than fifty years later, resembles popular historical fiction, a genre in which Krásnohorská's own biography would later feature.¹⁸ Her litany of remarks ascribed to “the maestro” ranges from the grandiose—as regards Richard Wagner and a putative Czech *Ring Cycle*—to the paternalistic and even conniving, coopting the librettist into a cynical plot at the expense of her brother-in-law. By the time she wrote this, of course, both Smetana and Palla were dead, thus Smetana's words about Palla's inability to complete the opera seem rather obviously prophetic.

Among these competing implications, Krásnohorská's comment about revising *Vlasta* is perhaps the most tantalizing piece of information in the above reminiscence, given that the extant libretto documents give evidence of substantial revision, particularly in the undated V2 text (figure 9). When and for whom these revisions occurred are impossible to ascertain, but clearly these documents were ultimately preserved in Palla's estate papers. The V1/V2 document consists of 47 pages of handwritten text: a fair copy of V1 with the V2 revisions overlaid in both pencil and ink. Some individual words are corrected in-line, some word order is changed, and many lines are truncated, merged, or replaced with new text in the margins. For lengthier changes, she inserted new pages with revised material, one edge pasted over the original such that both versions might be compared. There are nine such

17 Ibid., 21: “A příbuzný váš dal se již do komponování?” ptal se mistr s velmi živou účastí. ‘Dal,’ odpověděla jsem, a mistr, zamysliv se na chvilku, řekl s tak dobrotivou sdílností, jaké jen on byl schopen: ‘Váš příbuzný je nadaný, znám některé jeho skladby, a nechtěl bych položití nějakou překážku mladému skladateli do cesty, na kterou se směle pouští. Neříkejte mu nic, však se to rozluští samo sebou v můj prospěch. Váš příbuzný se brzy přesvědčí, že s operou nic nepořídí, neboť opera se nenapíše tak snadno jako písnička, a vašemu příbuznému asi schází k opeře ještě mnoho studií a předpravných prací. Uvidíte, že váš příbuzný svého pokusu dost brzy zanechá, a pak mi vaše ‘Vlasta’ připadne, že ano? [...] přál bych si, než byste pro mne upravila ‘Vlastu’, abyste dříve znala ‘Libuši’, jejíž hudbě jsem chtěl vtisknouti charakter českého starověku pohanského, a k volbě sujetů ‘Libuše’ i ‘Vlasty’ mě vede právě tak národní cit český, jako Richarda Wagnera cit německý k volbě staroněmeckých bájí.” Krásnohorská's strategy in not naming Palla in these anecdotes is unclear: though it may reflect her general tendency to shield even deceased members of her inner circle, the aspersions cast on the abilities of her “relative” might just as equally apply to her own brother, Jindřich Pech, whose career closely paralleled that of Palla.

18 See František D. Bulánek, *Žena jako meč: Z kroniky jednoho života* (Prague: Nakladatelství Vyšehrad, 1981); and Helena Hodačová, *Ptáci odlétají* (Plzeň: Západočeské nakladatelství, 1986).

insertions, though glue marks suggest that a tenth one may have been torn away. Most of the pasted insertions contain entire rewrites of one or more characters' speeches, or even of an entire ensemble. Some of the new lines of text are themselves edited, revealing Krásnohorská's creative process in detail. Though the V3 document seems largely to be a fair copy of the V2 changes, it also incorporates new cuts and reinstates lines from earlier versions (V1 or crossed-out portions of V2).

But the most surprising revelation that V3 brings is its date: on the upper-right corner of the title page, Krásnohorská wrote, "Plzeň, 25 May 1897, began copying."¹⁹ The V3 edit thus occurred almost thirty years after her first drafts of *Vlasta*, thirteen years after Smetana's death, and almost a full year after Palla's—it possibly represents Krásnohorská's final efforts as a librettist in her lifetime. We shall return to the implications of this document later in this chapter.

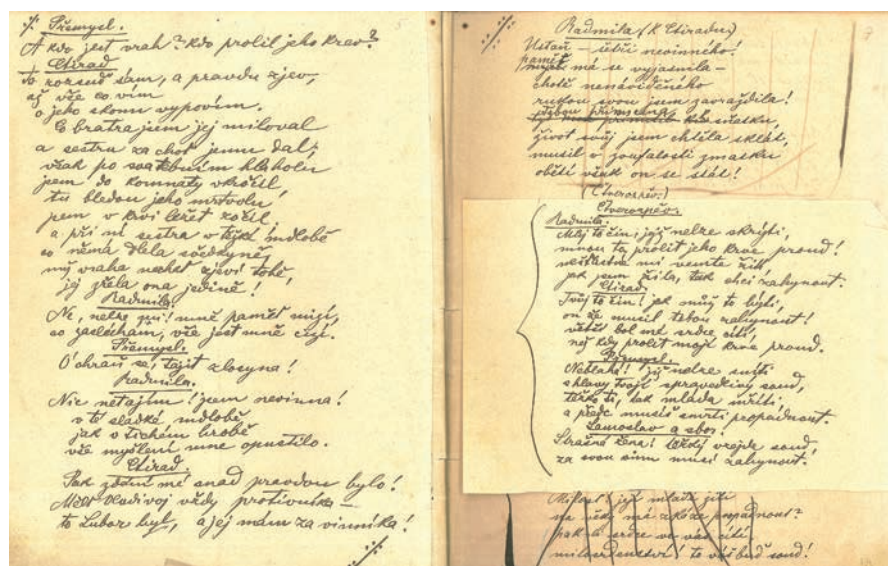


Figure 9: Eliška Krásnohorská, *Vlasta*, act 1, scene 1, V2 texts pasted over V1

19 Eliška Krásnohorská, *Vlasta*, AmP sig. H 2696 XXVIf/8/27, 1 (emphasis in original): "V Plzni dne 25 května 1897 začala opisovat."

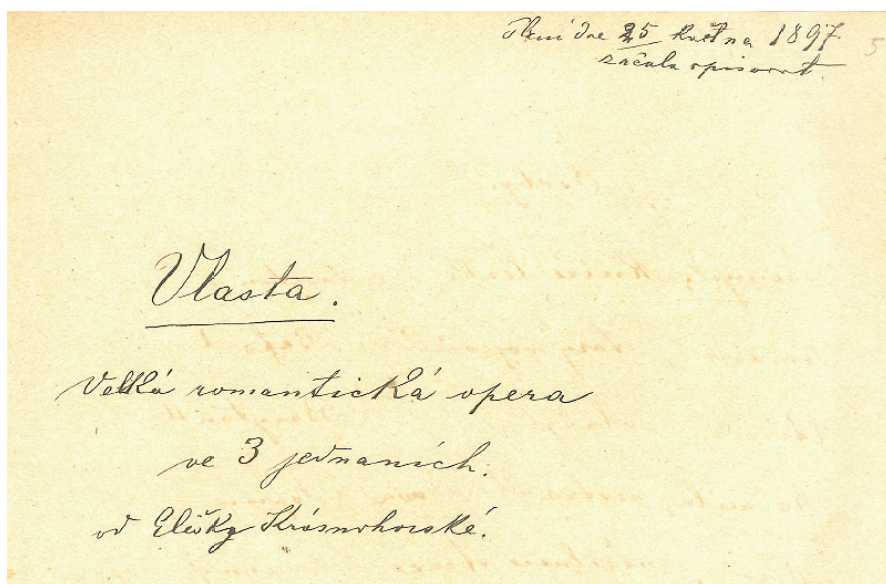


Figure 10: Eliška Krásnohorská, *Vlasta*, title page of V3 document with date

2. The Sources and Plot of Krásnohorská's *Vlasta*

To construct her libretto on the pagan legend of *Vlasta*, Krásnohorská would likely have turned to commonplace sources such as Cosmas's *Chronica Boemorum*, the so-called *Dalimilova kronika*, Hájek's *Kronika česká*, and, closer to her own time, Šedivý's *České Amazonky* or Hněvkovský's *Děvín*, should they have been available to her.²⁰ In fact, there are more than ten possible resources that predate Krásnohorská's *Vlasta* libretto, albeit not all accessible in 1869 (table 3). Not counted in this number is Václav Thám's lost play, *Vlasta a Šárka aneb Dívčí boj u Prahy* from 1788, though some of its contents may have been reused by his colleague, Prokop Šedivý. Klicpera and Tyl's plays both reference *Vlasta* and *Šárka* merely as a prior legend within the narration of different, though analogous, Maidens' Wars.

20 See Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory, and the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 15–42 (chapter 1: "Women on the Verge of History: Libuše and the Foundational Legend of Prague"), for an excellent overview and analysis of the Libuše/Vlasta/Šárka/Maidens' War legend.

Table 3: Possible historical and literary sources for *Vlasta's* plot

Date	Author	Title [Translation]
1125	Cosmas	<i>Chronica Boemorum</i> [Chronicle of the Czechs]
1314	“Dalimil”	<i>Dalimilova Kronika</i> [Dalimil's Chronicle]
1350-1400	Přibík Pulkava z Radenína	<i>Kronika česká</i> [Czech Chronicle]
1458 1487	Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II) (Czech translation Jan Hůska)	<i>Historia Bohemica</i> [History of the Czechs]
1501	Racek Doubravský	<i>Vlastae historia</i> [Vlasta's Story]
1543	Václav Hájek z Libočan	<i>Kronika česká</i> [Czech Chronicle]
1788	Václav Thám	<i>Vlasta a Šárka aneb Dívčí boj u Prahy</i> [Vlasta and Šárka, or the Maidens' War near Prague], lost
1792	Prokop Šedivý	České Amazonky aneb Děvčí bog w Čechách pod zprávou Rekyně Wlasty [Czech Amazons, or the Maidens' War in Bohemia under the Authority of the Warrior Vlasta]
1805	Šebastián Hněvkovský	<i>Děvín</i>
1827	Václav Kliment Klicpera	<i>Ženský boj</i> [The Women's Struggle]
1843	Josef Kajetán Tyl	<i>Nové Amazonky aneb Ženská vojna</i> [The New Amazons, or the Women's War]
1848	František Palacký	<i>Dějiny národa českého v Čechách i v Moravě</i> [History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia]
bef. 1872	Franz Grillparzer	<i>Libussa</i> ²¹
1869–1897	Eliška Krásnohorská	<i>Vlasta</i>

What these sources have in common are the basic plot elements: in the years after Libuše's death, Vlasta does not wish to relinquish power to Přemysl; men and women form separate armies; Šárka seduces Ctirad; Ctirad and/or the

21 Grillparzer's *Libussa* was one of three manuscripts discovered in his estate upon his death in 1872. While it would conceivably have predated Krásnohorská's *Vlasta*, it was not published until the year of his death.

female warriors perish in the final conflict; and peace is restored along with Přemysl's dynastic lineage. Enthusiasts of Schulzová and Fibich's *Šárka*, or Zeyer and Janáček's *Šárka*, will know that many of these and other plot elements were highly variable, particularly in the choice of *dénouement*. In most sources after Dalimil, Vlasta has a crucial, increasingly psychological role to play, in that she exhorts the women to defend their rights from the beginning of the story, and masterminds many of the subsequent episodes before her tragic (or, in many sources, well-deserved) demise. Plot elements that Krásnohorská removed from the traditional narrative include the Maidens' attack on the men's camp at Motol (the traditional catalyst of the conflict), the construction of Děvín castle, Přemysl's initial reluctance to fight, and various other median stages of the conflict that serve as escalations of the drama.

Table 4: *Vlasta's* cast of characters with voice types²²

Character	Voice type
Přemysl, Duke of Bohemia	Baritone
Samoslav, an old chieftain	Bass
Ctirad, a knight	Baritone
Radmila, Ctirad's sister	Soprano
Vlasta, marshal of Libuše's guards	Soprano
Šárka, Vlasta's comrade	Mezzo-soprano
Lubor, [a knight, Radmila's lover]	Lyric tenor
[Vladivoj, Radmila's recently deceased husband, dead before the opera begins]	–
Knights and squires, warriors, hunters, messengers, Libuše's female guards, Vlasta's warriors [hereafter, Maidens]	[Chorus]

What Krásnohorská adds to the story is fascinating: while each of her source documents includes a short list of side characters—individually named women and men from the rival armies—it is rare that they have a direct impact on the central quartet of Vlasta, Šárka, Ctirad, and Přemysl. From the very beginning of Krásnohorská's libretto we learn that Ctirad has a sister named Radmila, whom he had coerced into marrying the soldier Vladivoj (see table 4). The opening scene portrays Radmila's trial for her husband's murder: this is the judgment

22 Parenthetical texts in Table 3 denote my editorial additions; all other text is taken from AmP sig. LP 5883 81/34, 2. The voice types listed here reflect penciled text opposite the cast list, possibly in Palla's hand; these are carried over into the V3 fair copy in ink. AmP sig. H 2696 XXVIf/8/27, 6.

scene to which Krásnohorská's 1871 letter refers. Ctirad brings his sister forward as the only witness, though she denies participating in the murder; when Ctirad throws the blame on Vladivoj's enemy, the absent knight Lubor, Radmila defends him just as vehemently. A quartet with chorus ensues for Radmila, Ctirad, Přemysl, the vengeful chieftain Samoslav, and the male legislators.

The architecture of the scene reflects Krásnohorská's inheritance from French grand opera, carried over from *Lejla* and evident throughout her œuvre (table 5). Indeed, most of *Vlasta*'s scenes contain at least one musical number, identifiable either by written titles, brace brackets for ensemble singing, or both. While many of these would be altered over the course of the libretto's revisions, all but two (both in act 3) would remain in their respective scenes in some form—most often shortened for reasons of dramatic (and imagined musical) pace.

Table 5: The musico-dramatic architecture of *Vlasta*²³

Act/Scene	Characters	Dramatic content	Musical numbers
<i>A hall in Vyšehrad castle</i>			
I/i	Přemysl, Ctirad, Samoslav, Radmila, chorus of legislators	Radmila is judged guilty of Vladivoj's death; Ctirad defends her and blames Lubor	Quartet [with Chorus]
I/ii	The above; Vlasta, Maidens	Vlasta decries the lack of female judges; she rescues Radmila	Aria; Quintet with Chorus
<i>In the depths of an old forest at night</i>			
I/iii	Lubor alone	Lubor fears that Radmila killed Vladivoj	Aria
I/iv	Lubor, Vlasta, Šárka, Radmila, Maidens	Vlasta orders Lubor to be put in chains; Šárka reveals that she killed Vladivoj out of jealousy	Romance; [Duet]
I/v	Radmila alone; then Šárka, Lubor	Radmila and Lubor reunite, while Šárka plots her revenge	[Duet]
I/vi	Vlasta, Šárka, Samoslav, knights, Maidens	Samoslav's warriors enter Vlasta's camp, proposing peace; ends in a declaration of war	[Trio with Chorus]

23 Under the heading "Musical Numbers," parenthetical text denotes my editorial additions; all other titles appear in the V1 and/or later versions.

<i>Rocky, forested countryside near Ctirad's castle</i>			
II/i	Šárka, Vlasta, chorus of hunters (offstage)	Šárka observes the approach of hunters	[Chorus]
II/ii	Ctirad, Samoslav, hunters, knights; then Šárka, Vlasta alone	After the arrival of Ctirad's party, Šárka asks Vlasta to tie her to a tree	
II/iii	Šárka, Ctirad, First Hunter	Šárka pretends to be the victim of Radmila's treachery	[Duet]
II/iv	Šárka, Ctirad, Vlasta, hunters, Maidens	On Šárka's signal, Vlasta's warriors seize Ctirad; further declarations of war	
<i>Before the gates of Ctirad's castle, adjoining cliffs</i>			
II/v	Vlasta, Šárka, Lubor, Ctirad, Radmila, Maidens	Vlasta frees Lubor, then enacts a ritual oath against all men; Ctirad, alone, contemplates his betrayal	[Duet with Chorus]; Aria
II/vi	Šárka, Lubor, Radmila	Šárka brings Lubor to Radmila	
II/vii	Šárka, Lubor, Radmila, Ctirad	Šárka leads Ctirad in chains	Quartet
II/viii	Šárka, Lubor, Radmila, Ctirad, Vlasta, Maidens	Vlasta discovers the lov- ers, accused by Ctirad; Radmila jumps off the cliff, cursing Vlasta; followed by Lubor	[Quartet with Chorus]
<i>The interior of a tower in Ctirad's castle</i>			
III/i	Vlasta, Maidens	Vlasta prepares to wel- come Přemysl	[Chorus]
III/ii	Vlasta, Přemysl	Přemysl proposes peace; Vlasta proposes mar- riage; both rejected; Vlasta sets fire to Ctirad's castle	[Duet: cut in V2 and V3]
III/iii	Ctirad, Šárka, Mai- dens	Šárka fights Ctirad and kills him	
III/iv	Šárka, Vlasta, Maidens	Vlasta exhorts her com- rades to fight	[Duet and Chorus]

<i>The Maidens' camp with Vyšehrad in the background</i>			
III/v	Maidens (dancers)	The warriors dance with weapons	[Ballet]
III/vi	Maidens, Samoslav, Šárka, Vlasta, messengers	Samoslav announces that Lubor has survived	[Duet for Vlasta and Šárka: cut]
III/vii	Samoslav, Šárka, Vlasta, Lubor, knights, Maidens	Fight scene: Lubor wounds Vlasta; Samoslav kills Šárka	
III/viii	Vlasta, Přemysl	Vlasta, dying, asks Přemysl not to curse her for her love	

Immediately after Radmila is judged guilty for Vladivoj's murder, Vlasta and her warriors burst into the council chamber in act 1, scene 2, provoking a heated exchange between Vlasta and Přemysl over the rights of women.

Vlasta (*to the legislators*): What do I hear? Radmila is judged guilty for defending herself against the fiancé forced on her? Whoever protects their own life is lawful in your eyes, but you blindly call a criminal whoever protects their freedom?

Přemysl: Judgment was passed by holy law!

Vlasta: An inhuman judgment, where a man judges a woman,

not acknowledging how hard it is to be oppressed!

Only a woman has a right to judge a woman.

Přemysl: There are no more women judges—

Libuše, the sublime judge, has died!

Vlasta (*k sněmovníkům*): Co slyším! Radmila jest odsouzena, že bránila se choti vnucenému?

Kdo hájí život svůj, před vámi v právu jest, leč toho, svou kdo hájí svobodu, zločincem zvete, zaslepení?

Přemysl: Po právu svatém usnesl se soud!

Vlasta: Soud nelidský, kde ženu soudí muž,

nepoznav, jak jest těžko utlačené!

Jen žena právem ženu soudit má.

Přemysl: Již není ženy mezi soudci—

zemřela Libuše, velebná soudkyně!

Vlasta: There are no more women
judges—
justice itself has died!
(Aria)
Is a woman created to be a slave,
that you would cast her rights into the
dirt?
Just like you, her will is inherent,
and in her also resounds the desire for
love.
Must a woman's love be relinquished by
force?
Or would you relinquish yourselves thus,
cruel ones?
[...] No! I will reinstate the right of the
female judge;
I will save Radmila! Release her!²⁴

Vlasta: Již není ženy mezi soudci –
zemřela spravedlnost!
(Arie.)
Jest nevolnicí žena stvořena,
že v prach vrháte právo její?
Jak vám, tak jí jest vůle vrozena,
a tužby lásky též v ní znějí.
Má ženy láska vzdát se násilím?
Zda vzdáte vy se, ukrutníci?
[...] Ne! Právo soudkyně já obnovím,
Radmilu chráním! Propustte ji!

It is a remarkable text that invites the reader to view Vlasta's outcry through Krásnohorská's eyes, which is to say, that of late nineteenth-century feminism. It is important to note, however, that such proto-feminist declarations appear in most of the earlier variants: Dalimil, Přibík, Racek, Hájek, Šedivý, and Hněvkovský all make Vlasta's first utterance an exhortation to her warriors in support of women's rights and freedoms. Nevertheless, Krásnohorská's interpretation breaks new ground in that it seems to imply a radical restructuring of an entire system of justice around the trauma of violence toward women. As we shall see, the theme of women's rights forms an important thread throughout *Vlasta's* plot, one increasingly complicated by the actions of the title character.

After a quintet and double chorus, Ctirad turns to Vlasta with a plea to save his sister. In act 1, scene 3, we find Lubor alone in the forest, pining for his lover Radmila, whom he, too, suspects has murdered her husband. Vlasta and her followers, having liberated Radmila, arrive and detain *Lubor* as the murderer; but now we meet Šárka, who has a confession for Vlasta's ears alone. In her grim "Romance," Šárka reveals that Vladivoj had seduced her, and after Ctirad forced his sister to marry Vladivoj, Šárka took her jealous revenge by killing him *herself*. This prior history—invented by Krásnohorská—sets up not only the iconic Šárka/Ctirad tryst as a revenge seduction by proxy, but also the opera's tragic finale.

Unlike the fierce Vlasta, the prior historiography of Šárka is one of gradually increasing agency. First named by Dalimil, she appears as merely a pawn in Vlasta's ongoing attempts to undermine Přemysl by capturing and killing the virtuous Ctirad. Her character develops as dialogue is added by later authors

24 The quoted text comes from the V1 libretto fair copy. AmP sig. LP 5883 81/34, 9–10.

to the seduction scene, but only with Hněvkovský's 1805 epic poem *Děvín* do we see her as a military leader, driven by independent thoughts and actions. As evidenced from other literary and musical settings, Šárka's story would increasingly eclipse Vlasta's in the remaining nineteenth century. Like other late nineteenth-century dramatizations of the Šárka legend, her character's choices affect the fates of her entire faction, since through Šárka's duplicity, the question of Radmila and Lubor's innocence remains unresolved, and Vlasta's protection of them and Šárka becomes increasingly compromised.

The first half of act 2 treads the path common to almost all iterations of the Šárka/Ctirad legend, including the offstage approach of the men, Vlasta tying Šárka to a tree, and her feigned victimhood to kindle Ctirad's compassion and desire. But in Krásnohorská's rendition, Šárka does not fall in love with Ctirad during the seduction in act 2, scene 3, but rather uses this opportunity to sow the seeds of doubt in Ctirad's mind: as she tells it, it was Radmila, the true murderer, who has betrayed the innocent Šárka. Interestingly, Krásnohorská was of two minds regarding which character should give the fateful horn call, ultimately deciding in favor of Šárka, who reveals herself as his traitor once he is captured by Vlasta and her warriors.

A scene change in act 2 brings the women to an important threshold when Vlasta leads them in a ritualistic oath ceremony, in which they swear to abjure contact with and affection for all men, on pain of death—specifically, by jumping off the cliff visible on stage. Vlasta's text reveals how narrow the gap remains between social good (women's rights) and social evil (bloodlust and punishment):

Vlasta (*to the Maidens*): Come forward!
On the first day of my government
may a new law in our circle be enacted:
Man may no longer turn us into slaves,
we want to pull off the chains with an
iron hand.

Before victory we will cast off the chains
of all women,
we swear a vicious hatred towards men!

Šárka and the Maidens: We swear a
vicious hatred towards men!

Vlasta, then Šárka and Maidens: May any
maiden who feels love for a man fall from
these cliffs into the black abyss!²⁵

Vlasta (*k děvám*): Přistupte sem! V mé
vlády první den
buď nový zákon v kruh náš uveden:
Muž nesmí déle v otroctví nás mrhat,
železnou rukou chceme pouta strhat.

Než vítězství všem ženám pouta sejme,
nenávisť krutou mužům přísahejme!

Šárka a děvy: Nenávisť krutou mužům
přísahejme!

Vlasta [pak] Šárka a děvy: Ať děva, která
k muži lásku cítí,
se skály té se v černou propašť zřítí!

25 The text of this passage in all three versions of the libretto is identical, though the order of lines changes between V1 and V2/V3. The order presented here is from V2. AmP sig. LP 5883 81/34, 29.

The plot reaches its grim resolution by a series of onstage and offstage deaths in the vicinity of Ctirad's castle. The first is Radmila who, although freed by Vlasta, is caught once more with Lubor and, having broken Vlasta's rule of abjuring all men, must follow the new law and jump from the cliff to her death. Crucially, this too forms part of Šárka's revenge for having married Vladivoj: Radmila must be condemned for her love, and Šárka carefully choreographs the scene so that Ctirad can find and accuse the guilty couple. Before she leaps, Radmila curses Vlasta's misguided law, "O Vlasta, for this sin / will love be avenged in your breast!" ("O Vlasto, za ten hřích / se pomstí láska v ňadrech tvých!").²⁶ Lubor follows her over the edge, calling out to Ctirad to avenge Radmila. Over the course of act 3, Ctirad challenges Šárka in combat, but she wins the battle, and he dies by her sword. Now Lubor, who has miraculously survived his fall, reappears with the vengeful Samoslav to confront the Maidens; in the fray, Lubor wounds Vlasta, while Samoslav kills Šárka. Thus, while Krásnohorská follows the general trajectory of the Maidens' War and its final battle, so far none of the victims' fates aligns with any other variant of the legend.

Naturally, the most fascinating, and most problematic, fate belongs to Vlasta herself, whose two confrontations with Přemysl frame the action of act 3. In scene 2, Vlasta reveals that her main motivation for instigating the Maidens' War was her unrequited love of Přemysl, who rejects her yet again (initially demarcated by a duet in V1). While this scenario might seem gratuitously melodramatic, it was not without precedent: both Hájek and Šedivý mention that Vlasta proposes marriage to Přemysl to stem the conflict at the outset, which he rejects; Šedivý further complicates this by having Samoslav in love with Vlasta, who is secretly in love with Ctirad. These plot twists undermine the high-minded ideals of Vlasta's vision of a just and lasting matriarchy in Libuše's image, revealing tragic flaws that render this vision impossible. But it is perhaps Vlasta's own deranged, self-destructive act at the conclusion of the scene—in which she burns down Ctirad's castle while the Maidens are still in it—that sits most uncomfortably with the ideals of late nineteenth-century feminism. Vlasta, mortally injured, survives the carnage to face Přemysl once more in the opera's final scene, though her foremost concern while dying is redemption in the face of Radmila's curse. In her final words to Přemysl, she sings: "The earth spits me out—though I can yet die in bliss: / if only you do not damn me for my love!" ("Mně klne svět—však blaze umřít mohu / jen ty mne nezatrať za

26 This passage first appears in the margins of the V1/V2 manuscript, though it would seem to have been omitted from earlier drafts by mistake: without it, Vlasta's reference to Radmila's curse in act 3, scene 2 would be meaningless. Thus, we may consider it to belong to the V1 text (the corresponding passage in V2 is pasted over here, including these lines). AmP sig. LP 5883 81/34, 34.

lásku mou!”)²⁷ Krásnohorská, though a pioneer of women’s social justice, was clearly fully capable of developing a dramatic tale as a librettist, and that even if some of her heroine’s values might cohere with her own worldview (e.g., in the exhortation of act 1, scene 2), it was ultimately necessary to condemn “her” Vlasta for her immorality and cruelty, particularly toward other women.

3. The Fate(s) of Krásnohorská’s *Vlasta*

Gloomy was Bedřich Smetana’s mood when, after the joyous period of *Hubička*’s success, he began searching for a new operatic subject [...]. I don’t even remember if I renewed my attempt to persuade my intransigent relative to abandon *Vlasta*; I only know that it was too late—only when the immortal maestro fell asleep forever with his sweet dream of *Vlasta*, did it become clear in my mind what I must do while there was still time: I had to write a different, better *Vlasta* for him, and for the sake of preserving family peace, to accomplish it anonymously. Unfortunately, this thought was only instilled in me by an already futile regret, that I owed that great genius the fulfillment of his dearest wish.²⁸

Eliška Krásnohorská knew how to tell a good story. In her voluminous memoirs, it is the figure of Smetana, not Palla, who looms over the entire *Vlasta* project, from her wish to “see it in [Smetana’s] hands,” through the machinations to secure it from Palla, and lastly the alleged reasons for her belated revisions. The above excerpt invites us to imagine that the first, undated revision of *Vlasta* (V2) was accomplished for Smetana and not for Palla, and therefore the timing of that revision may coincide with either the period after the *Hubička* premiere or “only when the immortal maestro fell asleep forever,” after his death. Regardless, Krásnohorská implies that even if her revisions were ostensibly for Palla, their

27 This text comes from the V2 edit, AmP sig. LP 5883 81/34, 47, where it replaces the less dramatically charged V1 text, “Ach odpusť vinu mou, že jsem ti vzdorovala, leč vinou není mou, že jsem tě milovala!” (“Ah, forgive my guilt for having defied you, though I am not guilty for having loved you!”). In her V3 edit, Krásnohorská mis-corrected the final V2 phrase, “jen ty mne zatrat za lásku mou,” to “svou,” which would imply Přemysl’s love, not Vlasta’s.

28 Pechová-Krásnohorská, *Co přinesla léta*, vol. 2, 26: “Chmurná bývala nálada Bedřicha Smetany, když po radostně době úspěchu ‘Hubičky’ pátral po nové látce operní [...]. [A]ni již nepamatuji, obnovila-li jsem opět pokus přiměti neústupného svého příbuzného, aby upustil od ‘Vlasty’; vím jen, že příliš pozdě – až když navždy usnul nesmrtelný mistr i s milým svým snem o ‘Vlastě’, přišlo mi jasně na mysl, co jsem měla učiniti, dokud byl čas: měla jsem proň napsati ‘Vlastu’ jinou, lepší, a k vůli zachování příbuzenského míru to učiniti anonymně. Žel, že mi tuto myšlenku vnukla teprve marná již lítost, že jsem zůstala velkému tomu geniu dlužna splnění nejmilejšího přání.”

secret (anonymous) inspiration was Smetana. The anecdote may explain the mysterious date of 1897 on the V3 manuscript, to which she had returned “while there was still time”—albeit for herself alone. However, historians have pointed out several factual and chronological inconsistencies in Krásnohorská’s subsequent narrations,²⁹ and the timing or rationale for these revisions is ultimately conjectural.

Importantly, we do not know the character of Krásnohorská’s collaboration with Hynek Palla, since for several years their discussions would have occurred in person when both artists lived in Plzeň. Given the rough order of events—that Krásnohorská embarked upon several new librettos after completing *Lejla*, which premiered in 1868, that she had given *Vlasta* to Palla before her January 1871 letter to Smetana, and that she revised it at some point thereafter—I can only surmise that her revisions bear witness to her experience of working directly with a composer, once the first or second collaborations with Karel Bendl were complete. It was this experiential knowledge that provided the insights for her 1870 article, “On Czech Musical Declamation,”³⁰ which caught Smetana’s attention and prompted the rest of their creative partnership. The V2 text displays a tighter coherence of drama by shortening scenes, speeches, and even syllables per line. Although we lose a fair amount of beautiful, rhapsodic poetry from V1, we gain a more focused and deliberate use of language in V2. While the large-scale form of the drama does not change—including most of the arias, duets, and ensembles in the very same places—the text seems rewritten with musical needs in mind: the shorter line lengths imply a greater consciousness of rhythm and phrasing than the original. Lastly, the endings of scenes bear the most radical truncations, since, as Krásnohorská came to know over her career, music could convey the dramatic continuity or culmination of the plot, perhaps more effectively than words.

So, what was *Vlasta*’s fate in the hands of Hynek Palla? It is certain that he never completed his score, but the extent of his sketches and/or fully composed scenes will require a thorough investigation of Palla’s entire estate. The two items of music labeled “*Vlasta*” in the collection consist of a fair copy of the orchestral introduction to act 3, scene 1, with its opening women’s chorus and *Vlasta*’s first speech, in full score (figure 11); and a separate document for the choral parts alone.³¹ Importantly, the choral text comes from one of Krásnohorská’s pasted inserts in V2: this score reflects her *revision*, not

29 See, for example, Milan Pospíšil, “Bedřich Smetana as Viewed by Eliška Krásnohorská,” in *Bedřich Smetana 1824–1884: Report of the International Musicological Conference, Praha 24th–26th May 1994*, ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Marta Ottlová (Prague: Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, 1995), 62–75.

30 Eliška Krásnohorská, “O české deklamaci hudební,” *Hudební listy* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 1871): 1–4; 2, no. 2 (March 8, 1871): 9–13; 2, no. 3 (March 15, 1871): 17–19.

31 See footnote 10.

the original. Vlasta's text, however, differs from all the other extant libretti, including the later V3 from 1897. To his great credit, Palla's music in this excerpt is not the work of the begrudging amateur his sister-in-law portrays in her narrative, but rather that of a mature musician whose completed opera might have found success on the late nineteenth-century Czech stage. Palla's motivic style and orchestration are heavily influenced by Smetana, a notion that is both unsurprising for his generation and poignantly ironic, given the circumstances of *Vlasta's* dramatic and musical genesis and the competing wishes of its creators.³² The score itself is extremely detailed, down to the nuances of articulation, dynamics, and even conductor's markings; this is no forgotten sketch, but a performance edition, possibly of the excerpt played at a Plzeň concert in 1894, as described in Ladislav Potocký's obituary for Palla two years later: "The largest work that Palla was proudest of during his life is the unfortunately unfinished heroic opera *Vlasta* (on a libretto by Eliška Krásnohorská), an excerpt of which the composer gave at his concert in 1894."³³ It may have also been on the program at Palla's final appearance on December 14, 1895, which Potocký hailed as "*the triumph of Palla's art*" [*triumf Pallova umění*].³⁴ Given the polished maturity of act 3, scene 1, other excerpts of *Vlasta* may survive in his estate.

In 1880, Smetana refused Krásnohorská's offer to set her historical libretto, *Dítě Tábora*, to music, citing its thematic proximity to his own tone poem, *Tábor*, from five years earlier.³⁵ But had Palla relinquished the *Vlasta* libretto to Smetana in 1871 as a sequel to *Libuše*, the reverse might have been true: Smetana might not have gone on to compose his *Šárka* tone poem in 1875. It might have displaced one of Smetana's later operas, such as *Dvě vdovy* (composed in place of *Vlasta*) or *Čertova stěna* (composed last). While Janáček might have set Zeyer's *Šárka* libretto regardless, Fibich might not have composed his *Šárka* in the shadow of Smetana's *Vlasta*, nor Ostrčil his *Vlasty skon* ('The death of

32 Another fascinating parallel to Smetana (and *Libuše*) is the notion that Palla's *Vlasta* may have been intended for the long-awaited grand opening of the Plzeň opera house (now the Divadlo J. K. Tyla) in 1902, which Palla did not live to see. See Markéta Peroutková, "Hynek Palla a jeho plzeňské působení (Bachelor thesis: Západočeská Univerzita v Plzni, 2017), 33.

33 Ladislav Potocký, "Hynek Palla. Vzpomínky," *Dalibor* 18, no. 33–34 (September 12, 1896): 258: "Největší dílo, na němž si Palla za života svého velice zakládal, je nedokončená bohužel heroická opera *Vlasta* (na libretto Elišky Krásnohorské), z níž ukázkou podal skladatel ve svém koncertě r. 1894."

34 Ibid. (emphasis in original). The entire sentence reads: "Toho večera musel být Palla přesvědčen, že jeho skladby se líbí, bylť to skutečně *triumf Pallova umění!*" ("On that evening Palla must have been convinced that his compositions were enjoyed—it truly was a *triumph of Palla's art!*").

35 Eliška Krásnohorská – Bedřich Smetana, 119.

Úvod a scéna se zpěvohry. Vlasta. III. jednání *H. Palla.* 1.

Flauto piccolo
Flauti
Oboi
Clarinetto
Fagotti
Corni I
Trombi I
Tromboni
Tuba
Timpani
Cassa e piatti
Arpa
Soprani
II
Alti
Trombe II
Viola
Cello
Contrabbasso

Figure 11: Hynek Palla, *Vlasta*, Introduction to act 3, scene 1 in full score

Vlasta).³⁶ That Krásnohorská's libretto remained in obscurity in Plzeň caused an unseen ripple effect across the Czech fin-de-siècle, allowing space for further explorations of the legend of the Maidens' War. Like Krásnohorská, we would have loved to see *Vlasta* in Smetana's hands, but in the final tally, we may not regret it.

36 Anežka Schulzová wrote the libretto for Fibich's *Šárka* in early 1896. Karel Pippich wrote his libretto *Vlasty skon* and submitted it to the Národní divadlo libretto competition (which Krásnohorská won for *Dítě Tábora*); it was turned down by both Dvořák and Smetana, then accepted by Fibich but never completed. Otakar Ostrčil later set the libretto to music for his first operatic premiere in 1904.

II. Smetana's Reception of European Opera

Soundscapes of Italian Opera in Habsburg Bohemia, 1822–1862

1. Smetana and Italian Opera in Bohemia

One of the first references to music in Bedřich Smetana's recently edited diaries, dating from September 1840, lists the works the sixteen-year-old had heard at an *Akademie* in Tschechtitz/Čechtice, a small town near Beneschau/Benešov in central Bohemia. Following the overture of Peter von Winter's *Babylons Pyramiden* (an opera from 1797 based on a libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder), several concertos and chamber music, the *Akademie* concluded with the overture of Rossini's *Tancredi*.¹ If we were to believe Stendhal, shortly after the Venetian premiere of *Tancredi* in February 1813, everyone "from the gondolier all the way up to the grandest lord" was singing the "Ti rivedrò, mi rivedrai" from the final movement of the title role's entrance aria.² However, as Emanuele Senici has shown, there is little evidence to suggest that Venetians sang the tune in 1813. Instead, it was over the following decade that the cavatina from "Di tanti palpiti" became popular, and mostly abroad and among foreign travelers.³ For instance, Wilhelm Müller, whose poems Franz Schubert set in his cycles *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, picked up various vaudeville versions of the cavatina—sung on diverse texts and played by different instruments—in Vienna, and then elsewhere in Europe. Later he included the same lines in a *Sammlung italienischer Volkslieder*, which was published posthumously in Leipzig in 1829.⁴

1 Smetana, Bedřich, *Deníky*, vol. 1 (1840–1847), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Tomáš Bernhardt (Prague: Národní muzeum, 2022), 310 (September 1840).

2 Stendhal, *The Life of Rossini*, transl. Richard N. Coe (London: John Calder, 1985), 50.

3 Emanuele Senici, "Music and Memory in Rossini's Italy: 'Di tanto palpiti' as folk song," in *Gioachino Rossini 1868–2018: La musica e il mondo* (Saggi e fonti, 5), ed. Ilaria Narici, et al. (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini, 2018), 253–282.

4 Ibid., 256. An important impulse for the opera's German reception became the German-language piano-vocal score of 1822, on which other arrangements and extracts were based: *Tancredi: Melodramma eroico. Tankred: heroische Oper in Zwey Aufzügen* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, [1822]).

The tune's popularity was based on the Viennese success of *Tancredi* in 1816, which was followed by productions in Brünn/Brno and Prague in 1817, and a first *Tankred* in German in 1818.⁵ Subsequently, the work remained in the repertoire all over the Habsburg monarchy. Extracts of it were frequently played on festive occasions: In 1829, Prague marked the name day of Empress Maria Anna Carolina (wife of Ferdinand I) with a production of *Tancredi* in Italian, and Olmütz/Olomouc chose the same work to celebrate the Emperor's birthday in 1833.⁶ Moreover, alongside regular productions in Italian and German, the popularity of particular tunes and extracts from *Tancredi* came from the work's adaptations, and parodies based on the opera, in the theaters of Vienna's *Vorstädte*, which Barbara Babić has studied, and which were an essential part of Rossini's integration into the soundscape of Habsburg Europe.⁷ For instance, in 1833, the small Silesian Spa Karlsbrunn/Karlova Studánka witnessed a comedy show of the *Chemische Lach- und Witzfunken-Zündmaschine* with scenes from Rossini, Boieldieu, and Auber, produced by Karl Burghauser's Opern- und Schauspielgesellschaft from Troppau/Opava.⁸

Therefore, the inclusion of the overture to *Tancredi* in an *Akademie* in provincial Bohemia, as witnessed by Smetana, corresponded to the standard repertoire of any concert of operatic music within the monarchy. Reaching beyond the audiences of the Empire's principal theaters, such concerts, as well as arrangements of Rossini's works played at home, in coffee houses or the salons of the middle and upper classes, helped people all over the monarchy to discover Italian opera "off stage." For example, the diaries of Count Johann Nepomuk von Chotek mention regular private and public concerts at which extracts of Rossini's operas were performed;⁹ and Prague's periodicals were full of advertisements

5 See Walter Szmolyan, "Rossini's Opern in Wien," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 28 (1973): 220–232. For Bohemia see Axel Körner, "Culture for a Cosmopolitan Empire: Rossini between Vienna and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown," in *Gioachino Rossini 1868–2018*, 357–380.

6 *K.k. Private Prager Zeitung*, no. 174 (November 5, 1829). Jiří Kopecký and Lenka Křupková, *Das Olmützer Stadttheater und seine Oper* (Regensburg: ConBrio, 2017), 199.

7 Barbara Babić, "Rossini in 'Krähwinkel'? Una Parodia del 'Tancredi' Viennese," *Bollettino del Centro Rossiniano di Studi* 56 (2016): 9–61.

8 Georg Cox, *Theater und Musik – Soziale Metamorphosen zwischen Stadtherr und Stadt in der Deutschordensresidenz Freudenthal um 1800* (Weimar: VDG, 2014), 344. Similar for Vienna Michelle Leigh Clark, *The Performances and Reception of Rossini's Operas in Vienna, 1822–1825* (PhD. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2005), 88–98. Wolfram Hader, "Das Opernschaffen Franz Gläfers im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Musikrezeption," in *Die Oper in Böhmen, Mähren und Sudetenschlesien*, ed. Torsten Fuchs (Regensburg: Marquardt, 1996), 85–97: 97. Productions of Rossini in Troppau went back to the late 1820s. See Pavel Eckstein, "Frühe Daten aus der Operngeschichte Troppaus," in *ibid.*, 205–207.

9 Rita Steblin, "Weber-Notizen eines Prager Adligen. Johann Nepomuk von Choteks Tagebücher 1813–1823 in Bezug auf Carl Maria von Weber," in *Weberiana* 19 (2009): 19–78: 75. See also Clark, *The Performances and Reception of Rossini's Operas in Vienna*, 41.

for related piano-vocal scores and arrangements, despite the fact that Viennese print runs were readily available in Prague, too.¹⁰ As for Smetana's own encounter with Italian opera, a few months after the *Akademie* in Čechtice, he listened to the Concert Variations op. 8 on a cavatina from Vincenzo Bellini's *Il pirata* by Clara Wieck (recently married Schumann),¹¹ and over the summer he studied Adolf Henselt's Concert Variations op. 1 on "Io son ricco e tu sei bella" from Gaetano Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*.¹² In February 1843 he heard extracts from Bellini's *Norma* in a charity concert in Pilsen/Plzeň, as well as three overtures by Donizetti.¹³ He witnessed a fully staged opera by Donizetti in Plzeň in May 1841, *La Fille du régiment*, in German.¹⁴ A year earlier in Prague, he might have heard the soprano Wilhelmine van Hasselt-Barth appearing in three operas by Bellini: *Norma*, *La straniera*, and *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, as well as Donizetti's *Belisario* and works of Giacomo Meyerbeer.¹⁵ In the summer of 1841 he wrote his piano variations on a theme from Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*;¹⁶ and according to Brian Large, in 1840 he also had composed a fantasy for string quartet based on a motive from the second act of Bellini's *Il pirata*.¹⁷ It is worth recalling that at the time Smetana was only sixteen. He appeared regularly in public as a pianist and was presenting his first compositions, mostly dance music, but he had not yet decided to become a professional musician.

While Smetana's student diaries demonstrate his familiarity with Italian opera, the occasions when he discovered these works, and the venues where they were performed suggest that during the mid-nineteenth century, Italian opera, sung in different languages or arranged for piano and chamber ensembles, was ubiquitous in Bohemia. It formed an integral part of the Habsburg monarchy's soundscape. Throughout Smetana's career, including the years during which he lived in Sweden and when he contributed to establishing the Prozatímní

10 In Vienna, in 1822 alone, five different publishers produced piano-vocal scores of twelve of Rossini's operas, most of them readily available all over the Empire. Leopold Kantner, "Rossini nello specchio della cultura musicale dell'impero asburgico," in *La recezione di Rossini ieri e oggi. Convegno organizzato con la collaborazione della Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Fondazione Gioacchino Rossini, Società italiana di musicologia, Roma, 18–20 febbraio 1993* (Atti dei Convegni Lincei, 110), (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1994), 215. Clark, *The Performances and Reception of Rossini's Operas in Vienna*, 104–111.

11 Smetana, *Deníky*, vol. 1, 322 (February 1841).

12 Ibid., 384 (July 1841).

13 Ibid., 518 (February 1843).

14 Ibid., 550 (May 1841).

15 Ibid., 304 (June 1840).

16 Vladimír Helfert, *Die schöpferische Entwicklung Friedrich Smetanas* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1956), 25.

17 Brian Large, *Smetana* (London: Duckworth, 1970), 9.

divadlo (Provisional Theater) in Prague, productions of Italian opera, good or bad, remained a subject for discussion in his correspondence with friends and colleagues.¹⁸

Taking account of the role of Italian opera in Smetana's musical experience, this chapter reconnects the composer's early life with the origins of modern operatic history in Habsburg Europe.¹⁹ It contextualizes Smetana within the operatic history of the Habsburg monarchy, thus challenging conventional accounts of Czech music that have tended to reduce the history of music in nineteenth-century Bohemia to fierce competition between Czech and German music, and related institutions.²⁰ Reading Smetana within the history of opera in Habsburg Europe, therefore, contests historiographical and ideological conventions that have tended to turn the history of music into a mere function of a nationalist agenda.

2. Italian Opera and the Sound of Modern Life in Habsburg Europe

The central role Italian opera occupied in the monarchy's musical and operatic life was the direct consequence of aesthetic preferences that were shared by different social strata and nationalities across the Empire; but it also reflected operatic interests at the very top of the monarchy. For instance, the private library of Beethoven's famous pupil Archduke Rudolph counts one hundred-forty works by

18 Bedřich Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1 (1840–1862), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press; Prague: Národní muzeum, 2016), 278, 334–335, 366.

19 In this sense my chapter also reflects Michael Beckerman's insistence that "from the beginning Czech music has been a part of the Western European tradition." Michael Beckerman, "In Search of Czechness in Music," *19th-Century Music* 10, no. 1 (1986): 61–73: 63.

20 See for instance the introduction to Large, *Smetana*, XV–XVI. Likewise, John Tyrrell starts his standard history of Czech opera with a tale of Habsburg "occupation" of the Czech lands, reading modern concepts of ethnically defined nation states into the medieval and early modern history of Bohemia. A questionable historical account thus justifies the reduction of musical life into separate national categories. See John Tyrrell, *Czech Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1. His account ignores the extent to which nineteenth-century language policies in Habsburg Europe were driven by nationalist movements rather than the Empire itself. On this issue see Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation. Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans. A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Rita Krueger, *Czech, German, and Noble. Status and National Identity in Habsburg Bohemia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2009.

Rossini, including forty piano-vocal scores of his operas.²¹ Among the works the archduke wrote himself—many of them corrected by Beethoven—there is a theme and eight variations for clarinet and piano on a cavatina from Rossini's *Zelmira* (Antenore's "Sorte! Secondami"), probably written in 1822, when the opera was first produced at the Kärntnertortheater.²² In 1819 Rudolph had become archbishop of Olomouc, where he had only limited impact on the monarchy's operatic policies. but Austria's most famous statesman at the time, Prince Clemens von Metternich, moved Rossini to the very center of the Empire's operatic life: "What positive occurrence of my life is the Italian opera, which I finally managed to establish here—a true and great victory, which I achieved."²³ In these politically loaded terms, Metternich commented in April 1822 on the establishment of an Italian opera season in Vienna. Recently promoted from *Staatsminister* to *Staatskanzler*, in recognition of his achievements at the International Congress of the Holy Alliance in Laibach/Ljubljana, Metternich had operatic expertise and passion for Rossini that most of his biographers have ignored.²⁴ In doing so, they have missed out on a crucial aspect of the statesman's life for which there is plenty of evidence in his personal writings. For instance, after attending the dress rehearsal for *Zelmira* at the Kärntnertortheater, Metternich described the production's protagonist Giovanni David as "a beautiful tenor voice, with a depth and a height that one thinks he is either the epitome of manliness or nothing. He takes the high C with his chest as easily as he goes down [...]. This method is unparalleled; and his acting is most accomplished; in one word, he leaves nothing to be desired; and there are few things in this world that I am so confident to judge."²⁵ Writing with the assertiveness of an

21 Susan Kagan, *Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven's Patron, Pupil, and Friend* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1988), 152n.

22 Erzherzog Rudolph, *Variationen über ein Thema von Rossini für Klarinette (B) und Klavier* (Munich: Doblinger, 1981). The work was probably written for the archduke's Obersthofmeister Ferdinand Count Troyer, a respectable clarinet player. The piece is considered a genuine work by the archduke, with the manuscripts containing only very few corrections by Beethoven. See Kagan, *Archduke Rudolph*, 153.

23 Clemens Wenzel Lothar von Metternich, April 8, 1822, in *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 3 (II/1) (Vienna: Braumüller, 1881), 508–509: 508. All translations by the author.

24 Wolfram Siemann, *Metternich. Stratege und Visionär* (Munich: Beck, 2016), 574. Siemann restricts himself to only reporting that Dorothea von Lieven, Metternich's lover, performed Rossini arrangement for him on the piano.

25 Metternich, April 8, 1822, in *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 3 (II/1), 508: "Eine schöne Tenorstimme mit einer Tiefe und einer Höhe, daß man denken könnte, er sei einerseits der Inbegriff der Männlichkeit und andererseits gar nichts. Er nimmt ohne Anstrengung das hohe C mit der Bruststimme und geht mit Leichtigkeit herunter bis in die Untiefen der Brust. Diese Methode ist unvergleichlich und sein Spiel ein vollkommenes, mit einem Worte, er läßt nichts zu wünschen übrig, und es gibt wenig Sachen in dieser Welt, die ich mir so zu beurtheilen zutraue."

expert, Metternich exactly identified what was different about the new role of the tenor in Rossini's most recent work, and it had not been the first occasion on which he had been able to witness David's talent. When he had accompanied the Emperor to Naples, in 1818, Metternich reported to his wife Princess Eleonore von Kaunitz about his visit to the San Carlo theater: "Yesterday morning, I attended a rehearsal of Rossini's opera *Zoraïde* and had the chance to see the building in all its details. It is certainly the most beautiful [theater] in Europe. [...] I pass my evenings listening to David and Italy's very best musicians."²⁶

As for the possible competition between German and Czech opera, any history of music in Habsburg Europe needs to take account of the fact that throughout most of the nineteenth century, the Empire perceived German nationalism as a far greater political challenge than the representation of Czech or Slavonic interests.²⁷ A critical account of the history of Czech music, and of music in Bohemia, therefore, needs to go beyond heroic depictions of Smetana's struggle for his nation's natural rights against the allegedly despotic power of the Empire. If early biographers of Smetana like Vladimír Helfert emphasize the natural force behind the composer's musical genius,²⁸ they tend to ignore the role of musical and operatic conventions that formed the backbone of his musical upbringing in Habsburg Europe.²⁹ As for the underlying question of how language affected the life of theaters within many parts of the monarchy,

26 "J'ai [...] assisté hier matin à une répétition de *Zoraïde*, opéra de Rossini, et j'ai vu la salle dans tous ses détails. Elle est sans contredit la plus belle de l'Europe. [...] Je passe mes soirées à entendre chanter Davide et les premiers artistes de l'Italie." Clemens Wenzel Lothar von Metternich, letter to his wife, Naples, May 3, 1819, in *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 3 (II/1), 198–199.

27 For a comparative perspective on the aims of the Czech national movement within Habsburg Europe see Axel Körner, "National Movements against Nation States. Bohemia and Lombardy between the Habsburg Empire, the German Confederation and Piedmont," in *The 1848 Revolutions and European Political Thought*, ed. Douglas Moggach and Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 345–382. As for the power relations of the two main language groups in Bohemia, it should be noted that both language groups included members of different social classes. See for instance Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 44. For an overview of occupational structures see Pavla Horská, "Obyvatelstvo českých zemí podle povolání," in *Dějiny obyvatelstva českých zemí*, ed. Ludmila Fialová, et al. (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1996), 227–263. On the relationship between class and nationality also Stanley Z. Pech, *The Czech Revolution of 1848* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 17–21.

28 Helfert, *Die schöpferische Entwicklung Friedrich Smetanas*, 26, 28.

29 It is telling that the chapters on Smetana's childhood and youth in Brian Large's biography hardly mention the future composer's encounter with Italian opera, see Large, *Smetana*, 1–37. The same is true for the relevant chapters in Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich, *Bedřich Smetana und seine Zeit* (Laaber: Laaber, 2012), 37–62.

at least during his early years in Plzeň, Smetana did not seem much concerned about these battles, at least if we are to believe his diaries.³⁰

Confronted with the possible competition between different languages and cultures within the Empire, the promotion of Italian opera aimed at holding the monarchy's numerous nationalities and crownlands—and its many centers and peripheries—together. Playing Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti excited audiences as examples of music that stood for “the sound of modern life,”³¹ but Italian opera was also an allusion to the humanist values associated with the invention of opera during the Renaissance, understood as the revival of Greek classical drama. Therefore, the idea of opera forming the cultural backbone of a multinational and cosmopolitan Empire needs to be the starting point of any investigation into Smetana's musical experience and his development as a composer and organizer of Bohemian musical life.

At the time when Metternich, in his private correspondence and diary entries, praised the production of Rossini's most recent works in Vienna, the Austrian capital produced one of the Italian's works every second day, not counting the above-mentioned adaptations and parodies staged in the *Vorstädte*.³² Over Rossini's lifetime, no Italian city witnessed more performances of the composer's works than Vienna. Within this context, Vienna's *Rossini-Fest* of 1822 might simply be seen as another occasion to indulge in beautiful harmony, along the lines of Luigi Balocchi's libretto to Rossini's *Viaggio à Reims*, premiered in Paris in 1825: “Viva, viva l'armonia, ch'è sorgente d'ogni ben” (act 1, scene 25).

Metternich's efforts to establish an Italian opera season in Vienna, however, went beyond a mere operatic fashion for Rossini; they directly spoke to his idea of the monarchy as a supra- and multinational empire, and of the Holy Alliance as a guarantor of peace after decades of brutal warfare under Napoleon. Rossini's

30 Tomáš Bernhardt, “Plzeň doby Smetanovy,” in Smetana, *Deníky*, vol. 1, 31–49. This evaluation contrasts with Helfert's claim of Karel Havlíček's determining influence on Smetana's own language policies during those years, see Helfert, *Die schöpferische Entwicklung Friedrich Smetanas*, 18–19.

31 The quote refers to the title of Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris. The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On the changing semantics of time associated with Rossini also see Emanuele Senici, *Music in the Present Tense. Rossini's Italian Operas in Their Time* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

32 On Rossini's fortunes in Vienna during those years see Kantner, “Rossini nello specchio della cultura musicale dell'impero asburgico,” 215–222. Leopold Kantner and Michael Jahn, “Il viaggio a Vienna,” in *Rossini 1792–1992. Mostra storico-documentaria* Pesaro, ed. Mauro Bucarelli (Perugia: Electa 1992), 197–204; Michael Jahn, *Die Wiener Hofoper von 1810 bis 1836. Das Kärntnertheater als Hofoper* (Vienna: Apfel, 2007); Claudio Vellutini, *Cultural Engineering. Italian Opera in Vienna, 1816–1848* (PhD. diss., The University of Chicago, 2015); Clark, *The Performances and Reception of Rossini's Operas in Vienna*; Benjamin Walton, “‘More German than Beethoven’: Rossini's ‘Zelmira’ and Italian style,” in *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini*, ed. Nicholas Mathew and Benjamin Walton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 159–177; Babić, “Rossini in ‘Krähwinkel’?”

apparent ability to unite people beyond national borders played a key role in this enterprise, as testified by contemporary commentators and the Viennese press. Of *Zelmira*'s Viennese premiere, Friedrich August Kanne, one of Europe's most influential music critics at the time, argued in the semi-official *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den österreichischen Kaiserstaat*, "[t]he realms of beauty know no fatherland,"³³ by which he meant that during the performance, Rossini's music had succeeded in uniting people in harmony, contrasting with the effects of decades of warfare. Kanne himself had never been a fan of Rossini and he frequently dismissed Vienna's frenzy for the Italian composer as "Rosinen-Fieber,"³⁴ but *Zelmira* changed his mind. He described the atmosphere in the theater after the curtain-fall:

Rousing applause started from every side of the theater, whereby the emphatically clapping hands were undistinguished by difference of dialect, because they all belonged to human beings that were equipped with a free predisposition for beauty, and the free expression of their will was not obstructed by geographical lines or colors.³⁵

Italian opera, even in the eyes of its critics, had the ability to unite people.

3. New Revolutions and the Memory of War

The sudden outbreak of joy and harmony at Vienna's theaters appears even more remarkable if one considers the recent political events shaking the Habsburg monarchy, Europe, and much of the wider world. The political climate in Habsburg Europe, around the years of Smetana's birth, was marked by true anxiety over a recent challenge to the system of international relations, perceived as the very opposite of the *armonia* the Holy Alliance was striving for.

A new wave of revolutions marked Europe's political life during the early

33 Friedrich August Kanne, "Novellistik. K.K. Theater nächst dem Kärntner-Thore," *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den österreichischen Kaiserstaat* 6, no. 36 (May 5, 1822): 281–284; 283: "Denn im Gebiete des Schönen gibt es kein Vaterland!"

34 The term "Rosinen-Fieber" was frequently used in relation to Vienna's public frenzy around Rossini, making fun of Rossini's surname, but also referring to the prima donna in his opera of 1816 *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. See for instance Carl Maria von Weber, letter to Georg Friedrich Treitschke, Dresden, January 29, 1820, in *Complete Works of Carl Maria von Weber*. Digital Edition, <https://weber-gesamtausgabe.de/A041588> (accessed April 5, 2024).

35 Kanne, "Novellistik. K.K. Theater nächst dem Kärntner-Thore," 283: "Der Beyfallssturm begann nun mit aller Macht von allen Seiten, und zwar zeichneten sich die beredsam klatschenden Hände durch gar keine Verschiedenheit des Dialects aus, denn alle gehörten Menschen an, welche mit freyer Empfänglichkeit für alles Schöne ausgerüstet, und durch keine geographische Linie oder Farbe in ihrer freyen Äusserung gehemmt waren."

1820s, adversely affecting the stability of the monarchies that had re-emerged at the Congress of Vienna.³⁶ On January 1, 1820, Spanish officers, refusing to reconquer their kingdom's lost colonies, staged a rebellion and forced the king to reinstate the constitution of 1812. Six months on, in July 1820, army officers in Naples that were linked to the Carbonari staged a revolution against Ferdinand I. Moderate liberals were soon side-lined by more radical elements. By August the revolution reached Portugal, where the British were forced out to enable the King's return from Brazil. A constitution was granted, followed by the independence of Brazil. In the meantime, in October 1820, a rebellion in Lombardy had been suppressed, but in March 1821 a mutiny in Piedmont led to demands for war against Austria. A similar specter of war revealed itself in the Ottoman Empire, where a rebellion in Moldavia was suppressed, but soon followed by the beginnings of the Greek War of Independence. While Russia supported the uprising, Britain and Austria restrained the tsar from using it as a pretext to redraw Europe's political map.

Across the Atlantic, a possible connection between the revolution and the prospect of a global war was similarly evident. The Latin American independence movements had used the general upheaval to establish constitutional regimes, but the new revolutionary government in Spain was not prepared to let their remaining colonies go; when the Dominicans fought themselves free, they were immediately re-occupied by Haiti, the country the progressive world had looked up to in awe just a few years earlier when a slave revolt had led to independence from France. From today's perspective, we recognize these revolutions as important steps towards constitutional rule and the establishment of modern nation states.³⁷ At the time, however, Europeans witnessing the sudden changes around them did not know their political future; they only knew their past, which was that of another revolution, or perhaps two revolutions, the American and the French, which in both cases had led the world to an unprecedented cycle of warfare and destruction.³⁸

What people witnessed during the 1820s, therefore, was another wave of revolutions on a global scale, which, for many, revealed horrendous memories of two decades of brutal warfare under Napoleon, which had cost the lives of about

36 For the European dimension of these events see Jens Späth, *Revolution in Europa 1820–23. Verfassung und Verfassungskultur in den Königreichen Spanien, beider Sizilien und Sardinien-Piemont* (Cologne: sh-Verlag, 2012).

37 Maurizio Isabella, *Southern Europe in the Age of Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023).

38 On the international response of the American Revolution and the War of Independence see Axel Körner, *America in Italy. The United States in the Political Thought and Imagination of the Risorgimento, 1763–1865* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), 42–77.

five million people, with over forty percent civilian deaths.³⁹ Letters, diaries, and memoirs of soldiers recalling the experience of the wars were published in great numbers during those years and over the following decades. These memoirs and recollections outnumbered by far comparable publications of any previous wars.⁴⁰ Many of these works were widely read, discussed in the periodical press, and passed on to friends and families. Adding to personal experiences and oral accounts, and not counting for the numerous works that glorified the experience of battle, these works recalled “the physical hardships of campaigning, the threat of military discipline, the experience of combat, the fear of crippling wounds, sickness and disease,” creating an image of “unrestrained violence and total war,” as it characterized the Napoleonic period.⁴¹

Frequently, popular memoirs were associated with particular battles, with Borodino constituting an especially traumatic incidence, where up to eighty thousand soldiers died in a single day.⁴² But it was not death in battle alone. Of the two hundred forty thousand British troops who did not return from the wars, only some twenty-seven thousand died in battle, with typhus spread by lice being one of the deadliest diseases for soldiers.⁴³ The same wars had destroyed countless cities, towns, and villages, as well as the economic resources of millions of people. Families were exposed to pillaging and plundering during the campaigns, or robbery and violence in their aftermath, with administrative and legal structures corrupted by the break-down of social relations. Historian Catriona Kennedy has described how “trains of refugees, their possessions piled onto carts and wagons” had become a common sight throughout these conflicts.⁴⁴ Over and over again, refugees, as well as those left behind, died of starvation due to weather conditions or disease. Massacres among civilians by retreating armies were common occurrences.⁴⁵ In Bohemia in particular, the experience of war left a brutal impact on warriors and civilians alike: on women raped by soldiers, on families whose children were killed by disease or simply

39 Catriona Kennedy, “Women and the Home Front,” in *The Cambridge History of the Napoleonic Wars*, vol. 3: *Experience, Culture and Memory*, ed. Alan Forrest and Peter Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 73–92: 78. On the effects of the wars on civilians see *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790–1820*, ed. Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009).

40 Philip Dwyer and Matilda Greig, “Memoirs and the Communication of Memory,” in *The Cambridge History of the Napoleonic Wars*, vol. 3, 241–259: 242–245.

41 Leighton S. James, “The Soldiers’ Experience of War,” in *The Cambridge History of the Napoleonic Wars*, vol. 3, 9–29: 10.

42 Ibid., 21.

43 Ibid., 27.

44 Kennedy, “Women and the Home Front,” 75.

45 Ibid., 78.

unable to withstand the hardship, and villagers whose harvests and cattle had been confiscated countless times by trespassing armies.

These memories returned to Europeans when, in the 1820s, they found themselves in the midst of a new wave of revolutions, marking the political experience of people in Bohemia around the years of Smetana's birth in 1824. What most assessments of these events shared was their comparison with the Revolution of 1789. A revolution in one state, France, had first dismantled the constitutional structure at home, then initiated a conflict the world had never seen before. Jacobin terror had developed its own dynamic to enforce the revolution's concept of happiness on the whole of humankind. Pushing liberation from self-incurred tutelage to extremes in ways that had lost any of their Kantian foundations, nations seized power from their crowned heads only to lose it again to a despot who exported it to every corner of Europe. In the end, hundreds of thousands of men lay slaughtered in the fields around Leipzig, with the ground for growing wheat, wine, and potatoes soaked in their blood. The Bonapartist model of social mobility was what inspired the generals and the intellectual elites of the 1820s more than any of the revolutions' philosophical groundings.

4. The Experience of Terror and Metternich's Belief in the Pacifying Power of Music

Historian Wolfram Siemann's reading of Metternich's letters to his first wife, his lovers, and female friends has shown how deeply traumatized the statesman was by the dehumanized brutality of two decades of warfare.⁴⁶ His understanding of the present, the 1820s, was directly informed by this experience of the wars. What further fueled the fears of Europe's statesmen at the time was the close connection between the new wave of revolutions and the unprecedented cycle of terrorist attacks in many parts of the continent.

A particularly striking example was August von Kotzebue's assassination in 1819. Kotzebue worked as a Russian consul in Königsberg, but he was mostly known as a writer of popular plays who frequently got himself into trouble with the censors.⁴⁷ He was particularly popular in Bohemia, with over twenty of his works being translated into Czech.⁴⁸ Metternich's assessment of the attack, set out

46 Siemann, *Metternich*, 477–486, 552.

47 Karen Hagemann, "Männlicher Muth und Deutsche Ehre". *Nation, Militär und Geschlecht zur Zeit der Antinapoleonischen Kriege Preußens* (Krieg in der Geschichte, 8) (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), 130–131.

48 Dalibor Tureček, "August von Kotzebue auf der tschechischen Bühne (1800–1850)," in *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Prag. Begegnungen der Sprachen und Kulturen*, ed. Alena Jakubcová, et al. (Prague: Divadelní ústav, 2001), 56–64. Arthur Prudden Coleman, *Kotzebue and the Czech Stage* (New York: Electric City Press, 1936).

in a letter to his wife, speaks clearly: “Kotzebue’s assassination is not an isolated case. This will continue [...] I remind you that the world was in perfect health in 1789, comparable to the situation today.”⁴⁹ Analyzing the political climate that led to the playwright’s assassination, American historian Paul Schroeder noted “disturbing elements of Francophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and German frenzy.”⁵⁰ Metternich’s adviser Friedrich Gentz points to exactly this connection: “This is the consequence of the apparently so innocent, virtuous ambition of the German youth and of their commendable teachers, with which they wanted to silence us when we warned of the excesses at the Wartburg!”⁵¹

Metternich’s fears over the excesses of radicalism determined the political climate into which Smetana was born, and Kotzebue’s murderer was not alone in terrorizing Europe with attempts on the lives of crowned heads and government representatives. A few months later, on Valentine’s Day in 1820, Charles-Ferdinand d’Artois, le Duc de Berry and son of the later French king Charles X, was assassinated upon leaving the Salle Montansier of the Paris opera after a production of *Le Carnaval de Venise*, a ballet by Louis Milon with music by Louis-Luc Loiseau de Persuis and Rodolphe Kreutzer. The Duc de Berry might have been a future king, but certainly no tyrant. His assassination had major international implications, because the duke was the son of a princess of Savoy and married to Marie Caroline, Princess of the Two Sicilies. As a consequence, the event provoked a major outcry across Europe. About a week after the assassination, the Cato Street Conspiracy led by Arthur Thistlewood attempted to kill the entire British cabinet near Edgware Road in London. The plotters’ list of targets included the Prime Minister Lord Liverpool, the hero of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington, and Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh, who played a significant role in Metternich’s security policy. The plot unfolded during a particularly unstable period of British history, as one year earlier the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester had been the culmination of political unrest, leaving fifteen peaceful protesters dead and up to seven hundred injured. The conspiracy on Cato Street failed, but it was perceived as another sign of disturbance in the

49 Clemens Wenzel Lothar Metternich, letter to his wife, April 10, 1819, in *Aus Metternich’s nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 3 (II/1), 194: “L’assassinat de Kotzebue est plus qu’un fait isolé. Cela va se développer [...] Je vous réponds que le monde était en pleine santé en 1789, en comparaison de qu’il est aujourd’hui.”

50 Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 601.

51 Friedrich Gentz, letter to Clemens Wenzel Lothar Metternich, April 1, 1819, Vienna, in *Aus Metternich’s nachgelassenen Papieren* vol. 3 (II/1), 221: “Dahin haben jene unschuldigen, tugendhaften Bestrebungen der deutschen Jugend und ihrer verdienstvollen Lehrer, mit denen man uns den Mund stopfen wollte, als wir über die Excesse auf der Wartburg die erste warnende Stimme erhoben, geführt!”

international order. Its leader, Thistlewood, became the last person in England to be beheaded by axe.

What Europe needed after twenty years of war against France was quiet and stability, or so most European statesmen at the time thought. Instead, the security architecture established at the Congress of Vienna seemed to be crumbling. A fresh view on those years, therefore, helps us to rethink the intentions that informed Metternich's policies in Habsburg Europe. Historian Glenda Sluga has explained how starting with the Congress of Vienna, "men and women from across the European continent and the English Channel elevated new ideas, practices, and institutions of multilateral negotiation." With Metternich at their helm, they "invented a new culture of international diplomacy that expanded the possibilities of politics between states, from resolving territorial and fiscal disputes to advocacy for liberal principles, rights, and humanitarianism."⁵² Metternich compared this new "corporate body" emerging from the Congress of Vienna to "the great human society which grew up at the heart of Christianity," by which he meant the Holy Roman Empire, the Europe of Charlemagne at Aix-de-Chapelle and of Charles IV in Prague.⁵³ After the traumatic experience of the Napoleonic Wars, Metternich understood internationally agreed borders as a basic principle of international law. For the admirer of the British constitution, therefore, his policies were not aimed at suppressing national or democratic movements as such. What he opposed was a return to the revolutionary fanaticism that would lead Europe back into a situation where norms of international law could be overturned in the name of fashionable ideologies, with political maps being redrawn, and people freed to then go to war against each other. Metternich did not believe in ethnic concepts of national sovereignty because he knew that any such principle would justify new wars for the sake of alterations to existing borders.

Italian opera, understood as a shared European culture, was part of the remedies Metternich intended to use against such societal ills. Rossini's music, for Metternich, not only vocalized the sound of modern life, but it also stood for an art that had the ability to unite people across national, political, and religious boundaries, as Kanne described in his response to the Viennese premiere of *Zelmira*. This was the operatic world into which Smetana was born in 1824.

5. Rossini in Smetana's Bohemia

As the references to Smetana's early operatic experiences at the beginning of this chapter have shown, the frenzy for Rossini was more than a Viennese phenomenon;

52 Glenda Sluga, *The Invention of International Order. Remaking Europe after Napoleon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 2.

53 Ibid., 1.

the lands of the Bohemian crown provided a particularly fertile ground for its cultivation due to its close network of theaters. About the first performance of Rossini's *Armida* in Brno, in August 1822, the Moravian correspondent for Vienna's *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* wrote of "moving melodies, together with truthful and serious characterization, and rich and careful instrumentation."⁵⁴ His music seemed to touch a nerve among local audiences.

As a matter of fact, Bohemia's self-image as a proud center of European operatic culture had deep roots. Prague had been acquainted with Italian opera at least since 1627, when an Italian company performed an unnamed *Pastoral-Comedia* for Ferdinand III's coronation as King of Bohemia, probably the work of Italian nobleman Cesare Gonzaga.⁵⁵ For the coronation of Charles VI in 1723, an Italian company premiered *Constanza e Fortezza* by Johann Joseph Fux, involving one hundred singers and two hundred instrumentalists. For the occasion, Giuseppe Galli di Bibiena had built a gigantic open-air theater on the Hradschin, holding four thousand spectators.⁵⁶ Over the following century, the Bohemian nobility, due to their remarkable geographical mobility, witnessed Italian opera in many places, from productions at their own palaces to performances in all major European capitals. Bohemia's provincial capitals were similarly exposed to Italian opera. For instance, in Olomouc, productions by travelling companies from Italy date back to the 1750s.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Bohemia exported opera to other parts of the Habsburg monarchy, including Hungary and the newly acquired Kingdom of Galicia; even across the border in Saxony theaters relied on Italian troops joining them from Bohemia.⁵⁸ Therefore, Rossini was in no way Bohemia's first encounter with Italian opera.

54 *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung und Unterhaltungsblatt für Freunde der Kunst, Literatur und des geselligen Lebens* 15, no. 93 (August 3, 1822), 372: "Anmutige Melodien, dabei richtige strenge Charakteristik und reiche sorgfältige Instrumentation."

55 Alexander Buchner, *Opera v Praze* (Prague: Panton, 1985), 19. On the wider context of international theater in early-modern Prague see Otto G. Schindler, "'Englischer Pickelhering – gen Prag jubilierend'. Englische Komödianten als Wegbereiter des deutschen Theaters in Prague," in *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Prag*, 73–99. Otto G. Schindler, "'Die wälischen comedianten sein ja guet...' Die Anfänge des italienischen Theaters am Habsburgerhof," in *Opera historica* 8 (2000): 107–136: 109–111. For an overview of early Italian opera in Vienna see Herbert Seifert, *Die Oper am Wiener Kaiserhof im 17. Jahrhundert* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1985). In 1627 Ferdinand III was crowned as King of Bohemia, in 1637 he became Holy Roman Emperor.

56 Buchner, *Opera v Praze*, 20.

57 *Provincial Theatre and its Opera. German Opera Scene in Olomouc, 1770–1920*, ed. Jiří Kopecný and Lenka Krupková (Olomouc: Palacký University, 2015), appendix 1, 3.

58 Milena Cesnaková-Michalcová, "Die Theatermacher aus Böhmen in Ungarn im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Prag*, 178–184. Ian Woodfield, *Performing Operas for Mozart: Impresarios, Singers and Troupes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

In Smetana's youth, Rossini's grand opéra *Guillaume Tell* was particularly popular in Prague, showing that the composer's impact was not restricted to his earlier heroic operas. The city witnessed *Tell*'s first production just five months after the Viennese premiere on November 24, 1830,⁵⁹ at a time when Schiller's drama was also regularly being performed in Bohemia.⁶⁰ The local press immediately started advertising arrangements of the work.⁶¹ During Smetana's active period as a composer and conductor, even after Rossini's death in 1868, *Tell* remained popular in Prague. Smetana conducted two productions at the Prozatímní divadlo in 1866 and 1873,⁶² with additional productions in 1868, 1871, 1875, 1876, 1877, mostly at the Königlich deutsches Landestheater. In 1877 the *Prager Zeitung* opined that with *Tell*, Rossini had "embraced the cosmopolitanism of historically rooted *grand opera*."⁶³ For the paper, this opera came second only to his *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.⁶⁴ Other works by Rossini remained in the repertoire; in 1878 Smetana advised his friend Eliška Krásnohorská to take Dottore Bartolo as a possible model for one of the characters in his next work, possibly *Čertova stěna* (*The Devil's Wall*).⁶⁵

That the Moravian capital outmatched Prague in the number of performances of Rossini was due to Brno's proximity to Vienna, as well as to the presence of its large German-speaking population. With its principal theater being a municipal institution, the oldest of its kind in the Czech lands, founded in 1733,⁶⁶ the city saw many of Rossini's early productions soon after Vienna: *Tancredi* in 1817; *Elisabetta* in 1818; *Italiana in Algeri* in 1819; *Otello*, *Barbiere*, and *Gazza ladra* followed in 1820; *Turco in Italia*, *Torvaldo*, *Cenerentola*, and *Mosè* in 1821; *Edoardo* and *Zelmira* in 1822; *Donna del lago* in 1824; *L'Assedio di Corinto* in 1829; *Tell* in 1830; and *Le Comte Ory* and *Semiramide* in 1831.⁶⁷

59 *Brünner Zeitung der k.k. priv. mähr. Lehenbank*, (November 23, 1830).

60 *Brünner Zeitung* (January 13, 1829). *Prager Zeitung* (June 28, 1829, and August 11, 1833).

61 *K.k. Private Prager Zeitung* (November 8, 12, and 15, 1829).

62 *Prozatímní divadlo*, vol. 1: 1862–1883, ed. Václav Štěpán, and Markéta Trávníčková (Prague: Academia – Národní divadlo, 2006), 724.

63 *Prager Tagblatt* (June 18, 1877).

64 *Prager Tagblatt* (February 18, 1877).

65 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Eliška Krásnohorská, January 31, 1878, in *Smetana – Dvořák – Janáček: Musikerbriefe*, ed. Alena Wagnerová (Munich: dva, 2003), 79–83.

66 Margita Havlíčková, et al., *Německojazyčné divadlo na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2013), 10, 57–58. An index of the repertoire for the years 1848–1914 only lists titles of works, without differentiating between drama and opera: *Brněnské divadlo. Repertoár v letech 1848–1914*, vol. 1: 1848–1882, ed. Jarmila Zatloukalová (Brno: Archiv města Brna, 2001). For a historical overview of Moravian musical life see Christan Ritter d'Elvert, *Geschichte der Musik in Mähren und Österreichisch-Schlesien* (Brno: Winiker, 1873).

67 Kantner, "Rossini nello specchio della cultura musicale dell'impero asburgico," 219–220.

Over long periods during the 1820s, the local theater was dominated by almost daily performances of Rossini. While most of these productions were in Italian or German, in 1834 Brno saw its first *Barbiere* in Czech, shortly before Prague,⁶⁸ although the opera's earliest Czech libretto is possibly even older, dating back to 1825.⁶⁹ Rather than being understood as expressions of an exclusive ethnic nationalism, at the time it was often Bohemia's German-speaking or bilingual nobility that promoted performances in Czech. The use of Czech was seen as a means to underline Bohemia's particularity within the monarchy. None other than Emperor Joseph II had been a keen promoter of Czech as a language for the stage, contributing to his lasting popularity in Bohemia and among Czech speakers even after his death. Over three hundred pieces in Czech—many of them translations—date from Joseph's period in office.⁷⁰

A prevalence of Rossini in the repertoire of Bohemia's principal theaters does not mean that Rossini went uncontested. Seeing Prague's *Tancredi* in May 1817, Count Chotek not only noticed that it compared poorly with Vienna's production, he also did not take to the music, which he judged as "quite agreeable, but not very artistic, nothing amazing as in Cherubini or Spontini."⁷¹ In 1822 the local reviewer for the *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* in Brno praised the "many beautiful melodies" of *Eduardo e Cristina*, but resented "the triviality and altogether rather loose and sketchy treatment of the libretto," concluding that the opera "won't leave a lasting effect."⁷² The critic's view, however, differed considerably from Metternich's, who had seen the work the previous year in Ljubljana, during the Congress of the Holy Alliance, where it had been one of the Chancellor's few sources of joy during the difficult debates on the revolution in Spain.⁷³

In Brno in 1822, Rossini's *Eduardo e Cristina* had to compete against Carl Maria

68 Ibid., 222. Jiří Vysloužil, "Über die Oper im Brünner deutschen Stadttheater bis zum Jahre 1919," in *Die Oper in Böhmen, Mähren und Sudetenschlesien*, 120–126: 123.

69 S. K. Macháček, *Lazebník Sewillsky. Zpěvohra ve dvou jednáních* (Prague: J. Fetterlow, 1825).

70 Christoph Thienen-Adlerflycht, *Graf Leo Thun im Vormärz. Grundlagen des böhmischen Konservatismus im Kaisertum Österreich* (Graz: Böhlau, 1967), 155. On Joseph's role see also Robert Evans, "Joseph II and Nationality in the Habsburg Lands," in *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs. Central Europe c. 1683–1867*, ed. Robert Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 134–146.

71 Johann Nepomuk von Chotek, "Tagebuch am 4. 5. 1817," quoted in Steblin, "Weber-Notizen eines Prager Adligen," 69. The German version of *Tancredi* circulating in the Empire at the time was the work of a singer from Prague, Johann Christoph Grünbaum.

72 *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* 15, no. 20 (February 14, 1822), 80: "Eduard und Christine bietet wieder eine Fülle schöner Melodien [...] nur ist die Trivialität und die lose skizzenhafte Bearbeitung des Buches gar zu hervorspringend als daß die Composition, wenn auch nur teilweise, sich eines bleibenden Effekts versichern könnte."

73 Clemens Wenzel Lothar Metternich, diary, May 18, 1821, in *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. II/1, 440.

von Weber's *Der Freischütz*, which left a long-lasting mark on operatic debates in Bohemia.⁷⁴ At that time, Weber's opera had already seen its first performances in Czech, as *Čarostřelec* in Prague in 1821; another translation by Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek as *Střelec kauzedlnjk* followed in 1824.⁷⁵ Extremely popular among proponents of music theater in Czech, the opera was still regularly conducted by Smetana in the 1860s. The image that emerges suggests a rather relaxed approach to the ways in which Czech was promoted as a language for the stage. The work of a German composer could easily be adopted as a Czech national opera, irrespective of the fact that many Germans also considered it their national opera. Likewise, Czechs did not seem particularly concerned that their national myth, the story of Libuše, was frequently turned into plays by German authors, including Clemens von Brentano and Franz Grillparzer, and set to music by German composers, among them Conradin Kreutzer, sixty years before Smetana's version hit the stage in Prague's new Národní divadlo (National Theater) in 1881.

These examples demonstrate the problem of reducing music history to national contexts. Opera mattered to national movements, but not always in the ways we imagine. In the Czech case, back in the 1820s, the leader of the Czech national movement František Palacký regularly intervened in debates on the translation of libretti, in particular on Czech versions of Mozart's operas;⁷⁶ but this was the same Palacký who in 1848 declined his invitation to join the German national assembly in Frankfurt, pointing out that if the Austrian Empire did not already exist, it would be necessary to invent it for the sake and the betterment of humanity.⁷⁷

This chapter's perspective on Smetana's early musical experiences challenges established views of operatic history in Bohemia, but finds itself in line with recent accounts of the Habsburg Empire. Historians have turned away from an idea of the Habsburg monarchy as a prison of peoples, or an Empire doomed to fall due to its national diversity. Instead, researchers have started looking at concepts such

74 Even in August local audiences filled the theater to see the opera: *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* 15, no. 125 (October 17, 1822), 499.

75 Friedrich Kind and Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek, *Střelec Kauzedlnjk* (Prague: Bohumil Háze, 1824).

76 On Palacký's musical interests see Anja Bunzel, "František Palacký's (Musical) Life with the 'Aristocrats': Private and Semi-Private Musical Sociability in Prague during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Musilogica Austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies* (June 2023), <https://www.musau.org/parts/neue-article-page/view/158> (accessed January 8, 2024).

77 František Palacký, "Eine Stimme über Oesterreichs Anschluss an Deutschland (1848)," in *Gedenkschriften. Auswahl von Denkschriften, Aufsätzen und Briefen aus den letzten fünfzig Jahren als Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte* (Prague: Tempsky, 1874), 148–155. On the problem of Bohemia's membership in the German Federation in 1848 see, Jiří Kořálka, "Prag – Frankfurt im Frühjahr 1848: Österreich zwischen Grossdeutschtum und Austroslawismus," in *Österreich und die deutsche Frage im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. (Wiener Beiträge zur Geschichte der Neuzeit, 9), ed. Heinrich Lutz and Helmut Rumpler (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik Wien, 1982), 117–139.

as national hybridity and national indifference characterizing large parts of the Empire's populations. Within this context of research, historians have explored the role of dynastic patriotism and of multiple loyalties—connections between local, national, and imperial identities—especially regarding the monarchy's historic crownlands and the territories of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. As Metternich recognized, opera could play a crucial role in forging the Empire's diverse polity together, a state that refused to become a national monarchy like Britain or France, or a nation state like Germany and Italy. Opera was meant to strengthen the relationship between the Empire and its nationalities and crownlands. Emphasizing operatic exchanges between the Empire's nationalities and crownlands does not deny that there was a connection between the politics of nationalism and the production and reception of opera. Instead, while acknowledging this connection, a wider perspective on the monarchy's musical life shows how music and opera were experienced by different social and national groups across the Empire, and how the monarchy supported opera as a means to create cultural and intellectual connections between its different lands and peoples, as well as between its political centers—cities like Vienna, Prague or Brno—and its peripheries.

This investigation started with the young Smetana's early encounters with Italian opera. First in Plzeň and subsequently during his travels, Smetana heard Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti in provincial theaters, or extracts of their works in *Akademien* or at the salons of the local middle class. Two decades on, when the Prozatímní divadlo started its regular seasons, the same music still dominated the stages.

On November 20, 1862, the Czech version of Luigi Cherubini's *Les deux journées ou le porteur d'eau* opened the Prozatímní divadlo's long run of Italian (and French) opera. It was followed in quick succession by František Škroup's *Dráteník* on December 8 and Vincenzo Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* in the translation by Václav Alois Svoboda three days later. Regarding its repertoire, the Czechs' new theater was perfectly in line with musical preferences elsewhere in the monarchy.⁷⁸ The following year, on January 24, 1863, Smetana conducted a new production of Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, which had a total of twenty-four performances until 1867. Two weeks later, on February 7, 1863, the Prozatímní divadlo premiered Giuseppe Verdi's *Il trovatore*, which would see 115 performances until 1883. On March 15, 1863, Smetana premiered Rossini's *Barbiere*, with fifty-two performances until 1878, followed throughout spring and summer by Donizetti's *Belisario*, Rossini's *Otello*, and Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'amore*.

Of twenty-one different works presented in 1863, six were of Italian origin, six German, and seven French, along with one Irish (Michael William Balfe's

78 Prozatímní divadlo, vol. 1, 68.

The Bohemian Girl), and František Zdeněk Skuherský's Czech opera *Vladimír, bohův zvolenec*, based on Josef Václav Frič's *Der Apostat*.⁷⁹ Over the following decade, until he stopped conducting at the Prozatímní divadlo, Smetana brought to the stage Luigi and Federico Ricci, Donizetti's *Lucia*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and the two productions of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, mentioned earlier, as well as Beethoven's *Fidelio* and works by Auber, Bendl, Glinka, Gluck, Gounod, Halévy, Lortzing, Měchura, Meyerbeer, Moniuszko, Mozart, Rozkošný, Spohr, Weber, and his own operas. Rather than a "national" theater, the Prozatímní divadlo was and remained mostly a European theater. Smetana continued to play a significant role as a leading conductor of the European repertoire, continuing a great Habsburg tradition of promoting European and especially Italian opera. Regarding his interest in Rossini, Smetana operated perfectly in accordance with Metternich's belief in the power of the Italian's music. Shortly before the statesman died in 1859, while Smetana was in Leipzig, Metternich had written to his friend Rossini, "the world is in need of harmony. [...] You don't have the right to stay silent. That is my opinion, clearly expressed."⁸⁰ Smetana, a great European, seemingly agreed.

79 Ibid., 73.

80 Clemens Wenzel Lothar Metternich, letter to Gioachino Rossini, April 11, 1859, in Clemens Wenzel Lothar von Metternich, *Mémoires, documents et écrits divers laissés par le prince de Metternich, chancelier de cour et d'état*, ed. Rudolf von Metternich, vol. 8 (Paris: Plon, 1884), 628–629: "Le monde a besoin d'harmonie [...]. Vous n'avez pas le droit de vous taire. Voilà mon jugement clairement formulé."

Smetana and Opera in his Correspondence and Diaries*

Bedřich Smetana turned his attention to composing opera at a mature age, namely in the early 1860s, when, after a five-year stay in Gothenburg, Sweden, he became involved in the newly forming cultural life of Prague and began to participate in the activities of some of the new Czech musical institutions. From then on, opera became the dominant genre of his work. He devoted his greatest creative efforts to it until the end of his life, and his eight completed operas represent the cornerstones of modern Czech opera. Smetana was involved in opera on various levels connected to his current situation and professional activity, not only as a composer, but also as a performer, conductor, opera director, music critic and, last but not least, as a spectator. These diverse contacts and the knowledge and experience gained from them undoubtedly helped shape his relationship to opera and influenced his work. Information on Smetana's encounters with opera is provided by surviving written sources, especially his diaries and letters sent and received.

Smetana kept diaries in varying degrees of detail from 1840 almost throughout his life until 1883.¹ The only major time gap is partly filled by the retrospective diary of his first wife, Kateřina, written probably between 1856 and 1858 but recording the period from her marriage in August 1849 to the beginning of 1855.² Because Smetana's correspondence is rather sporadic, the diaries, still written in German, represent the main source of information, which the letters increasingly supplement, until 1862. After that, however, the form of the records changed, and apart from the transition from German to Czech, the entries are much more concise; their quantity and detail fluctuate from year to year, and they do not record everything

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1 To date, only selected portions of these have been published. It was not until 2022 that the critical edition of Smetana's student diary was published as the first volume of their intended complete critical edition: Bedřich Smetana, *Deníky / Diaries*, vol. 1 (1840–1847), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Tomáš Bernhardt (Prague, Národní muzeum, 2022). Autographs of all diaries are held in Prague, Národní muzeum – Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany in the Bedřich Smetana Collection, S 217/1080–1124. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references to diaries, correspondence, and other sources will refer solely to the respective inventory numbers of this collection.

2 Autograph, 2 fascicles, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1903, 1904.

of importance. Although in certain areas Smetana's diaries have continued to be indispensable, letters—both sent and received—provide most of the information. Smetana's first known letter is dated August 1843, and as his activities and social and artistic contacts grew, so did the quantity and narrative value of his correspondence. The greatest portion dates from the last decade of his life (1874–1883),³ since after he became deaf in 1874 he depended chiefly on written communication.⁴ Among other written sources, we have Smetana's repertoire statistics and records of operas performed during his tenure as the principal conductor of Czech opera at the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater) from 1866 to 1874, as well as detailed lists of performances and financial returns of his operas, which he kept from 1866 onwards. His operatic knowledge and opinions are reflected in the reviews he wrote in the 1864/65 season for the daily *Národní listy*, which, with just a few exceptions, survive only in printed form. Some other sources also provide partial information, as do Smetana's later memoirs and those of his contemporaries, which were published in magazines and books towards the end of his life and in the subsequent decades.

Smetana's first contact with opera is documented as early as 1830, at age six. At an academy held in Litomyšl/Leitomischl on October 4 by the students of the local philosophical lyceum to celebrate the birthday of the Austrian Emperor Franz I, he played a piano transcription of the overture to Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (*Die Stumme von Portici*).⁵ An article written decades later reported:

[...] in the public academy, not yet 6 years old [!], gave a solo recital on the piano and caused such admiration that one of the present guests put him on his shoulder and showed him to all the audience to loud applause.⁶

- 3 In 1884 he wrote only disjointed and confused letters, and the correspondence he received consisted mainly of congratulations (letters and telegrams) on his sixtieth birthday.
- 4 Smetana's correspondence started to be published individually and in the form of various compilations in magazines and books as early as the 1880s, so a substantial part of it became available, albeit with varying degrees of editorial treatment. However, it has not yet been published in its entirety. The preparatory work for its comprehensive critical edition has been systematically carried out since 2005, and in 2014 the editorial preparation of individual volumes began; three have been published so far: Bedřich Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1 (1840–1862), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague, Národní muzeum / Koniasch Latin Press, 2016); vol. 2 (1863–1874), ed. Olga Mojžíšová etc. (Prague: Národní muzeum / Koniasch Latin Press, 2020); vol. 3 (1875–1879), ed. Olga Mojžíšová, etc. (Prague: Národní muzeum / Koniasch Latin Press, 2023).
- 5 Bedřich Smetana, [Diary I], 1840; Smetana, *Deníky*, vol. 1, 290: "In my 7th year at the academy in Leutomischl I performed the overture to *La muette de Portici*" ("Im 7^{te} Jahre gab ich bey Akademie in Leutomischl die Ouverture zur *Stummen* zum Besten.")
- 6 "Feuilleton. Bedřich Smetana," *Květy* 2, no. 3 (July 18, 1867): 23: "[...] ve veřejné akademii, nejša ještě úplných 6 let stár [!], solo na pianě přednášel a takový obdiv působil, že jej jeden z přítomných hostů vyšinul na rameno a veškerému obecenstvu při hlučném potlesku ukazoval."

In the following years he encountered opera as a pianist and violinist, and as an observer. At the Gymnasium in Německý Brod/Deutschbrod (1836–1839), he played piano lessons to the music-loving Professor Šindelář, with whom he is said to have first encountered a piano transcription of an opera, namely Hérold's *Zampa*, and it was there that he also got to know Weber's *Der Freischütz*:

[...] here Professor Šindelář, an ardent friend of music, took a great liking to the young virtuoso, and the young second-year, and later third-year pupil, often had to play the piano for him. With Šindelář Smetana learned his first opera in a piano transcription, namely "Zampa" [...].⁷

While studying in Prague (1839–40), Smetana played the violin in a student quartet with his former classmates from Německý Brod.⁸ Arrangements of opera items apparently formed an important part of their repertoire—the surviving first violin part from the estate of František Buttula, who was the main initiator of these quartet productions, contains fifteen items from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and excerpts from several other operas.⁹ Whether and how often Smetana attended opera performances at the Königlich deutsches Landestheater (Royal German Theater) in Prague is not indicated in his Prague diaries,¹⁰ but we can assume at least occasional visits according to his later recollections, recorded in a later article: "But once Smetana was in Prague, it put an end to all his studies; [...]"

7 V. Klatovský, "Bedřich Smetana. Náčrtek životopisný od [...]," *Světobzor* 16, no. 1–2 (January 1 and 7, 1882): 7, 10, 18–19: 7: "[...] zde k mladému virtuosu přízní velikou přilnul profesor Šindelář, vřelý hudby přítel, a mladý sekundán a později tercián často mu hrál musel na piano. U Šindeláře Smetana seznal první operu v klavírním výtahu, totiž 'Zampu' [...]" See also Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Bedřich Smetana II. Na studiích* (Prague: Hudební matice Umělecké besedy, 1925), 71–75.

8 See Smetana's letter to his former classmate and fellow musician František Buttula on September 10, 1863, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 32–33: "I too can assure you that I [...] have often recalled, on many occasions, the time when we used to play in quartets and cards in Platněřská Street in Prague." ("Těž já Vás mohu ubezpečit, že jsem [...] častokráté také \si/ spomněl, a mnohokráté na onu dobu, když jsme v platněřské ulici v Praze ve quartetech a v karet hrávali.")

9 Prague, Národní muzeum – České muzeum hudby, Department of Music History, sign. XXXIX A 617.

10 In his diary, Smetana mentions only six performances of the farce with songs: *Die schlimmen Frauen vom Serail* (Franz Told and Heinrich Proch) in May 1840 and guest appearances in June and July by the Viennese actors Carl La Roche and Johann Nestroy and the Bayerische Hofoper (Bavarian Court Opera) soprano Wilhelmina Hasselt-Barth. Whether he saw any of their performances, however, is not evident from his entries (Smetana, *Deníky*, vol. 1, 300, 302, 304). For a detailed summary of the opera and drama repertoire of the Landestheater in the 1839/40 season, when Smetana was studying in Prague, see Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Bedřich Smetana III. Praha a venkov* (Prague: Hudební matice Umělecké besedy / Sbor pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovi v Praze, 1929), 89–132 (chapter V: "V divadle").

Instead of diligently attending the Old Town gymnasium, he attended concerts, all kinds of musical productions and the theater.”¹¹

While studying in Plzeň/Pilsen (1840–1843), he borrowed and copied music from some local families. Among them were piano pieces on operatic themes, which were then played in the home environment as well as at public events:

I also received, from the councilor's wife [Anna Leipold], the variations on a theme from Bellini's *Il Pirata* by Clara Wieck. The variations are very beautiful. I thus intend to practice this piece in particular.¹²

The councilor's wife gave me the wonderful Variationen de Concert on a motif by Donizetti, composed by Ad. Henselt. I had them copied out and will study them at home during the holidays.¹³

He performed operatic items by Donizetti (an unspecified overture), Bellini (*Norma*) and Kreutzer (*Das Nachtlager in Granada*) as a violinist in the orchestra at the local charity academies on February 17 and April 14, 1843.¹⁴ The repertoire of the theater companies operating in Plzeň at that time included various charming plays and comedies with singing, mostly of Viennese origin, and occasionally operas. Among Smetana's theater entries we can find a critical assessment of a performance of Donizetti's opera *La Fille du régiment* (*The Daughter of the Regiment*):

On Sunday the 14th, Lutz gave a performance of the Daughter of the Regiment. People were full of expectation to see “Marie”, and as a result the theater was overcrowded. – But the anticipation proved deceitful, for Siegmann sang badly, and the others not at all. Much had to be left out, of course. Today was thus not satisfying.¹⁵

11 “Feuilleton. Bedřich Smetana,” *Květy* 2, no. 3 (July 18, 1867): 23: “Jak ale jednou Smetana v Praze byl, bylo veta po všem studium [...]. Místo pilně navštěvovat staroměstské gymnasium, chodil po koncertech, všelikých hudebních produkcích a do divadla.”

12 Smetana, [Diary I], February 7, 1841, in Smetana, *Deníky*, vol. 1, 322: “Auch erhielt ich von der Ráthinn [Frau Anna Leipold] die Variationen über ein Thema aus den Piraten des Bellini von der Clara Wieck. Diese Variationen sind sehr schön; daher trachte ich besonders dieselben einzuüben.”

13 Smetana, [Diary II], July 29, 1841; Smetana, *Deníky*, vol. 1, 384: “Die Ráthinn gab mir die schönen Variationen de Concert über ein Motif von Donizetti componirt von Ad. Henselt. Ich ließ mir sie abschreiben, und werde sie in Ferien zu Haus einstudieren.”

14 See Smetana, *Deníky*, vol. 1, 518, 546.

15 Smetana, [Diary VII], May 14, 1843, in Smetana, *Deníky*, vol. 1, 550: “Sonntag den 14. gab Lutz die Tochter des Regiments zur Aufführung. Man war voll Erwartung die ‘Marie’ zu sehen, und somit war das Theater überfüllt. – Aber man täuschte sich in der Erwartung;

These sporadic and so far only occasional contacts with operatic music, of which there were undoubtedly more than he recorded, certainly broadened Smetana's operatic knowledge and may have influenced his further interest in opera.

From autumn 1843 Smetana lived in Prague. From 1844 to 1847 he studied composition with Joseph Proksch and earned his living as a music teacher for the family of Count Leopold Thun-Hohenstein. According to the later recollections of his pupil Elisabeth Kaunitz, he already had a great knowledge of musical literature and he introduced her to various operas, specifically Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* and *Les Huguenots*.¹⁶ The few letters from this period and the diary do not mention opera, but we can assume that his good income enabled Smetana to attend opera performances at the Landestheater and to acquire music literature more easily, further expanding his operatic horizons.

In the following years, Smetana—from August 1848 already the owner of a music institute—followed the events on the Prague opera stage mainly as a spectator. He did not keep a diary and his correspondence is still rather sparse. The diary of Kateřina Smetanová, however, shows that they apparently visited the theater frequently, as they were allowed to use the box of Count Erwein Nostitz, whose children studied with Smetana. They also received free tickets from Kateřina's aunt, the Landestheater actress Anna Kolárová, who was the wife of playwright, actor, and director Josef Jiří Kolár, the younger brother of Kateřina's father. From her diary entries it is clear that they saw Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Der fliegende Holländer*, whose Prague premieres took place on February 23 and September 7, 1856, and Kateřina specifically mentions her impressions of *Tannhäuser*, which premiered on November 24, 1854:

Friedrich was entirely enraptured by Wagner's opera! We were given the Nostitz box at the next performance, and I had the opportunity to join in Fritz's delight. Although I already know three of Wagner's operas and all three of them interest me, the finale of the first act of *Tannhäuser* left quite an impression on me indeed!¹⁷

Opera also influenced Smetana's teaching work. According to surviving programs, his pupils studied and occasionally performed works on operatic themes, which

denn die Siegmann sang schlecht, und die andern gar nicht, vieles mußte natürlich ausgelassen werden, so war man heute nicht befriedigt."

16 Alois Hnilička, *Rozhledy po životě a významu Bedřicha Smetany* (Prague: Mojmír Urbánek, 1924), 51.

17 Kateřina Smetanová, [Diary], Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1904, fascicle II, f. 102v–103r: "Friedrich war ganz entzückt von Wagners Oper! Bei den nächsten Aufführung bekamen wir die Nostitzische Loge, und ich hatte Gelegenheit Fritz's Entzücken zu theilen. Obwohl ich nun bereits 3 Opern Wgrs: kenne, und mich alle 3 immer sehr interessieren, so macht doch den größten Eindruck auf mich das Finale des 1^a Aktes aus *Tannhäuser*!"

were widespread and popular at the time, at the schools' public concerts. For ensemble piano playing, which was part of the curriculum, opera overtures were often arranged for multiple pianos for two and four hands. Probably under the impression of the premiere of *Tannhäuser*, Smetana arranged the overture for four pianos and sixteen hands, which was first performed at the fourth soirée of his institute on March 25, 1855. Its whereabouts are unknown today, however.¹⁸ He may have made more such arrangements, but names of arrangers were not usually listed in the programs.¹⁹

The years 1856–1861 and briefly in the spring of 1862 in Gothenburg, Sweden, formed Smetana's most intense period of concert activity. His piano repertoire included some concert music on opera themes, exclusively by Liszt: *Einzug der Gäste auf der Wartburg* LW A176/1 (November 6, 1857), *Réminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor* LW A22 (February 23, 1860), *Paraphrase de concert sur Rigoletto* LW A187 (March 26, 1862).²⁰ But above all, it was here as director (i.e., choirmaster) of the private amateur music society Harmoniska sällskapet that he first took up more systematic conducting. The choice of repertoire was entirely within his competence. Although the choir members and eventual soloists were mostly amateurs—chiefly local wealthy merchants and industrialists and their family members—Smetana led them in quite demanding works not only of the classical repertoire but also of contemporary composers. In addition to oratorios and cantatas (Händel, Haydn, Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Schumann, Gade) or parts of them, they included choruses and scenes from operas such as *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, *Guillaume Tell*, *Fidelio*, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, *Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and Louis Spohr's *Zemire und Azor*.²¹ Rehearsing such works with untrained amateurs was difficult, but through this demanding practice Smetana gained practical experience as a conductor and chorus master, which he later put to good use in Prague as principal conductor of the opera. As he had in Prague,

18 Later, the arrangement was played by Smetana's pupils in Gothenburg at his concert on April 14, 1858, and at a public rehearsal at his local institute on April 30, 1858. In September 1858 Smetana lent the manuscript of the arrangement to his teacher Joseph Proksch for performance at a public rehearsal at his school on October 23, 1858. See Smetana's correspondence with Proksch, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 1, 98–107, 116.

19 See surviving concert programs of the Smetana Institute, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1572–1591.

20 For concert posters see Göteborgs universitetsbibliotek, Affischsamlingen [poster collection].

21 See for example Smetana, [Diary], March 23, 1859, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1096: "Soirée No.2 of the association [...] In the second half trio from William Tell, Finale (Adagio) of the second act of Tannhäuser. Orpheus choruses of furies, whereby Ms. Lamm, one of my singing pupils, sang Orpheus quite well, then the finale from Fidelio." ("II. Vereins Soirée. [...] In der 2 Abth. Terzett aus Wilhelm Tell, Finale (Adagio) des 2 Akts aus Tannhäuser. Orpheus Furienchöre, wobei Frau Lamm, eine meiner Gesangsschülerinnen, den Orpheus recht brav sang, sodann Finale aus Fidelio [...].")

Smetana made use of the arrangements of opera items for multiple pianos when teaching ensemble playing at his local music institute in Gothenburg.²²

During these years, Smetana also recorded in his diaries his visits to theaters, especially opera performances. He commented on some of them, especially the singing performances, briefly but succinctly, sometimes humorously or ironically, and his comments are similar to his later opera criticism. When abroad, he always used stops in Berlin and Dresden to visit theaters on his journeys from Prague to Gothenburg and back.²³ The only opportunity to attend an opera in Gothenburg was during his last stay there in the spring of 1862, when the German opera company directed by Emil van der Osten performed there for the first season to considerable interest from the local public:

Although the members, gathered from all corners of the world, are rather mediocre, except for Ms. Beck-Weixelbaum, the divorced wife of the famous baritone, Beck, in Vienna), the audience supported the enterprise in large numbers because of its novelty. – Mr. v. d. Osten is doing good business. Today I saw the Daughter of the Regiment, actually the Mother of the Regiment, as one little jokester claimed, since Mrs. Beck, who performed the role, is 50 years old!²⁴

In his diary Smetana commented on six performances in March and April 1862. Some soloists of the Osten ensemble also participated in opera items at Smetana's local concert on March 26, 1862.

22 See the programs of public rehearsals of the Smetana Institute, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1592–1594.

23 There is an entry about a performance in Berlin of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with the guest Spanish soprano Amalia Anglés y Mayer on May 21, 1857, and on September 7, 1860, *Die Stumme von Portici*: “I have met with the fate of hearing The Mute Girl of Portici every time in Berlin. This is already the third time.” (“Mich trifft das Loos, jedesmal in Berlin die Stumme zu hören. Dieß ist schon das drittemal.”) And on his last trip to Sweden, on March 9, 1862, he reviewed a performance of Spontini's opera *Fernand Cortez*: “I have not seen such a miserable performance for a long time! I could hardly believe my eyes and ears that I should be at the Berlin Court Opera.” (“Ein so miserable Aufführung habe ich lange nicht gesehen! Ich traute kaum meinen Sinnen, daß ich in der Berliner Hofoper sei.”) From Dresden we have an entry about *Don Giovanni* on May 18, 1861; see diaries from 1857, 1860/61 and 1861/62, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1092, 1098, 1099.

24 Smetana, [Diary 1861/62], March 18, 1862, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1099: “Obwohl die Mitglieder zusammengerafft aus allen Ecken und Enden der Welt ziemlich mittelmäßig sind, außer Frau Beck-Weixelbaum, geschiedene Gattin des berühmten Bariton Beck in Wien, so hat das Publikum der Neuheit wegen zahlreich die Unternehmung unterstützt. – Herr v. d. Osten macht gute Geschäfte. Heute sah ich die Regimentstochter, eigentlich die Regimentsmutter, wie ein Witzling behauptete, da Frau Beck 50 Jahre alt ist, und diese Rolle gab!”

During his holiday visits to Bohemia, Smetana attended opera performances at the Landestheater, especially those by guest soloists, which took place during the summer months. The diaries from 1859–1861 contain records of these performances (Smetana did not keep a diary from the summer of 1857 onwards and spent the summer holidays of 1858 in Sweden):

Les Huguenots in the evening with Mrs. Maelow, and Mr. Sontheim as Raul from Stuttgart. The former performed the role of Margarethe exquisitely. Particularly superb technique. He is a very well-trained tenor.²⁵

In the evening we were with Toni at “Don Juan”! Ms. Lukka sings well, however, further studies would be advisable given her considerable youth.²⁶

After arriving in Prague, I read the playbill on the next corner and shouted: “Dinorah by Meyerbeer! I have to go there!” [...] Unfortunately, we had to hurry home before the third act, as Betti developed one her terrible headaches, on the one hand because of the exciting scenes that day and also due to heat on the journey. – I left gladly, as neither the music nor the plot of the opera appealed to me.²⁷

Mme. La Boide from Paris made a guest appearance in August. Consummate technique but a small voice.”²⁸

The complimentary and critical remarks here also include Smetana’s explicitly expressed attitude to the work of Richard Wagner:

Tannhäuser with Tichatschek. This time I had the sort of pleasure I cannot remember having had for a long time. All the declamatory passages were masterful, and I wished that Wagner’s opponents would have heard them

- 25 Smetana, [Diary 1859], August 24, 1859, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1096: “Abends Hugenotten mit Frau Maelow, und H. Sontheim als Raul von Stuttgart. Erstere gab die Margarethe vorzüglich. Besonders brillante Technick. Er ist ein sehr geschulter Tenor.”
- 26 Smetana, [Diary 1860/61], May 31, 1860, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1098: “Abends waren wir mit Toni im ‘Don Juan’! Frl Lukka singt brav, jedoch bei ihrer großen Jugend wäre ihr noch mehr Studium empfehlenswerth.”
- 27 Smetana, [Diary 1860/61], August 9, 1860, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 218/1098: “In Prag angekommen, las ich den Theaterzettel der nächsten Ecke, und rief: ‘Dinorah von Meierbeer! Da muß ich hingehen!’ [...] Wir mußten leider vor dem 3 Aufzuge nach Hause eilen, da Betti durch die aufregenden Szenen des heutigen Tages einestheils, auch durch die Hitze der Reise, Ihr Kopfübel in großem Grade bekam. – Ich ging gerne fort, da mich weder Musik noch Handlung der Oper ansprachen.”
- 28 Smetana, [Diary 1860/61], August 1861, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1098: “Im August gastirte Mad. La Boide aus Paris. Vollendete Technik, aber kleine Stimme.”

today in order to realize that he is a true reformer and takes dramatic truth more seriously than all of them put together.²⁹

A fundamental change occurred after Smetana's return to Bohemia from Sweden. Opera was then at the apex of the social hierarchy of art forms and the creation of a national opera was one of the main goals in the emancipation of national culture. As early as February 1861, to encourage local opera, Count Jan Nepomuk Harrach announced a competition for the best Czech historical and comic opera; the building of the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater), the first permanent Czech professional opera house, which opened in November 1862, provided a powerful stimulus to these efforts. In this context, Smetana shifted his main interest to opera as a composer, conductor, and, briefly, a music critic. He probably decided to take part in Harrach's competition while still in Sweden, because immediately on his return to Bohemia in May 1861 he began to search for a suitable libretto, which he eventually obtained from Karel Sabina.³⁰ His first opera, *Braniboři v Čechách* (*The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*), was written between 1862 and 1863, and after completing it in April 1863, he immediately entered it in Harrach's competition.³¹

Smetana's reviews and articles in the daily *Národní listy* demonstrate his great knowledge of the operatic repertoire and the all-round erudition with which he assessed the standard of opera performances at the Prozatímní divadlo and formulated his opinions on the current state and mission of Czech opera and the conditions under which it operated. However, he did not speak about his critical activity in his letters and diaries.³² On the contrary, we learn from them that Smetana unsuccessfully applied for the prestigious position of principal conductor of opera at the Prozatímní divadlo as soon as he returned from Sweden, and did not lose sight of this goal in the following years.³³ He succeeded only in 1866, after the successful premieres of his operas *Braniboři v Čechách* (January

29 Smetana, [Diary 1860/61], June 20, 1861, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1098:

"*Tannhäuser mit Tichatschek*. Dießmal hatte ich einen Genuß, wie ich mich lange eines ähnlichen nicht zu erinnern vermag. Alle deklamatorischen Stellen waren meisterhaft, und ich hätte gewünscht, die Gegner Wagners hätten sie heute gehört, um einzusehen, daß er ein wirklicher Reformator ist, und mit der dramatischen Wahrheit es ernstlicher meint, als sie Alle zusammen genommen."

30 He first approached the playwright Josef Jiří Kolár unsuccessfully (Smetana, [Diary 1860/61], May 28 and July 18, 1861, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1098). He received Sabina's libretto in February 1862 and completed a sketch of act 1 the same month; Smetana, [Diary 1861/62], February, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1099.

31 Smetana, [Diary 1862–1875], April 19, 1863, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1099.

32 For a complete edition of Smetana's criticism with detailed subject index see Václav Hanno Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany* (Prague: Nakladatelství Pražské akciové tiskárny, 1948).

33 See entries from February 1862 and 1864 in Smetana, [Diary 1862–1875], Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1099; also Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 1, *84–*85; vol. 2, *19.

5)³⁴ and *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) (May 30), and a theater association made up of wealthy, patriotic Czech businessmen took over management from the previous German directors.

Operating issues were undoubtedly dealt with primarily through day-to-day personal contact at the theater, which is probably why information about Smetana's activities as a conductor appears only sporadically in his correspondence and diaries, thus providing only a peripheral glimpse of the day-to-day operational matters of the opera that involved him, such as personnel issues, his work as a conductor, etc. Smetana had a limited influence on the choice of the repertoire since the management of the theater had the final say, but his handwritten statistics and summaries of the opera repertoire during his tenure as principal conductor at the Prozatímní divadlo have been preserved.³⁵ The repertoire during Smetana's era was made up of most of the well-established works that had already been performed in the previous period; Italian, German, and French opera were all represented. Smetana's critical views on Italian opera, which he had previously presented in his reviews, were not, with a few exceptions, reflected in the opera dramaturgy. Although he was considered a Wagnerian, he had already ruled out the performance of Wagner's operas before his arrival at the Prozatímní divadlo in 1864, mainly because of its inadequate premises: "[...] Wagner could be performed, but only if there were an appropriate hall for it! But there is time for that!"³⁶ Thanks to the growing activity of local composers, the proportion of original Czech works increased under Smetana, and some other new works by Slavic composers were added: Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmila*, Moniuszko's *Halka*, and works by Ivan Zajc. Smetana expanded the classical opera repertoire by adding Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1869), Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1872, arranged by Richard Wagner) and the first Czech production of Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1870). Operetta also occupied an important place in the repertoire. Mainly for economic reasons, the repertoire under Smetana was varied in terms of authorship, genre, and quality.

Smetana's responsibilities as a conductor covered mainly *grand opéra*, which he expanded to include Gounod's *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*; he also conducted Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, most of the performances of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* and *Robert le diable*, works by Mozart and Gluck, and Weber's *Der Freischütz*. The

34 It was not until March 1866 that the jury of Harrach's competition decided to award the first prize to *Braniboři v Čechách*, see Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 60–61, 119, 122.

35 Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1145–1147.

36 Smetana, Bedřich, "Feuilleton. Veřejný život hudební v Praze. Opera II," *Národní listy* 4, no. 190 (July 15, 1864): [1]: "[...] mohl by se provozovati i Wagner, ovšem kdyby patřičná místnost k tomu byla! Avšak to má čas!" Smetana included excerpts from Wagner's operas on several occasions at least in the programs of philharmonic concerts that he conducted: the overture to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (December 12, 1869; April 16, 1871), *Tristan und Isolde: Isoldens Liebestod und Verklärung* (April 27, 1873).

conducting of Italian opera, along with comic operas and operettas, fell to the second conductor, Adolf Čech, but this division of conducting responsibilities was less strict in practice. For example, Smetana conducted most of the performances of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Luigi and Federico Ricci's comic opera *Crispino e la comare*, Auber's new work *Le Premier Jour de bonheur*, and some performances of such repertoire stalwarts as Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, Verdi's *Il trovatore*, Halévy's *La Juive*, and Auber's *La Muette de Portici*. During his tenure at the theater, he conducted all the performances of his own operas and staged most of the new operas by Czech composers.³⁷

At the turn of the 1870s, growing controversy between the "Old Czechs" and the "Young Czechs" on the Czech political scene began to interfere with the management of the theater, as did disputes about the nature and direction of Czech opera, partly related to disputes about Wagner and his principles of music drama. These controversies directly affected Smetana in terms of his composing and his work in the theater, and even jeopardized his position as head of opera. In letters to his opponents and the theater management at the time, he defended himself against the attacks, citing his contributions to Czech opera, extensive repertoire statistics, and comparisons with the era of his predecessor.³⁸ After the onset of his deafness and his departure from the theater, Smetana was constantly discussing with theater companies the conditions of his continued stay with the theater and the performance of his operas.³⁹ These matters crop up quite frequently in his correspondence, but they are beyond the scope of this study in terms of their subject matter and, above all, their scope and complexity.

Smetana's diaries and correspondence contain various strands of information about his operatic works. They concern both his creative process and the operas themselves, as well as matters related to their performance, dissemination, and reception. However they provide very little information regarding the choice of themes and librettos for his first five operas. All we know from the diaries is that his pupil Ludevít Procházka gave him the libretto for *Braniboři v Čechách*

37 The proportion of opera performances conducted by Smetana can only be partially identified, as the names of conductors were only sometimes listed on theater playbills (Václav Štěpán and Markéta Trávníčková, *Prozatímní divadlo* [Prague: Academia and Národní divadlo, 2006], vol. 1, 66), and Smetana only kept sporadic notes of his conducting activity in his own statistics.

38 On this matter, see Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, *68–*72 (relevant passages of the introductory biographical study) and Smetana's correspondence with František Pivoda (1870, 1874) and with the association and directorate of the Prozatímní divadlo (1872, 1874), where references are made to other literature and contemporary sources, especially polemical texts in the press.

39 For more see Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, *55–*59 (introductory biographical study) and correspondence with the association and the directorate of the Prozatímní divadlo.

by Karel Sabina,⁴⁰ and that on July 5, 1863, Smetana bought from Sabina the libretto for *Prodaná nevěsta*,⁴¹ the score of which he completed in 1865.⁴²

Smetana does not mention Josef Wenzig, the librettist of *Dalibor* and *Libuše*, or Emanuel Züngel, the author of the libretto of *Dvě vdovy*, regarding the choice of themes and the texts of their librettos. Since all of them were active in Prague, it can be assumed that Smetana's communication with them and their possible collaboration on the libretti took the form of personal contacts. While evidence of Smetana's creative dialogue with the first three librettists is entirely lacking, correspondence with Eliška Krásnohorská, the librettist of the last operas (*Hubička*, *Tajemství*, *Čertova stěna*, and the unfinished *Viola*), documents their collaboration on all four libretti quite extensively, from the origin of the subject matter to the completion of the individual operas, which is illustrated by the surviving manuscripts of her texts with Smetana's interventions.⁴³ Krásnohorská captured Smetana's creative mood and intentions and readily acceded to his wishes for adaptations and changes. Only with *Čertova stěna* did she disagree with Smetana's shift of her comic libretto to a more serious romantic tone, yet she respected it. According to the cuts and alterations in the manuscripts of the other librettos, and in some cases also according to the first editions of the librettos and the differences in the texts of the sketches and scores, one may assume that Smetana worked with the previous librettists much as he had with Krásnohorská and that he therefore contributed significantly to their final

40 Smetana, [Diary 1861/62], February 1862, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1099: "I have finally received an opera text, namely by the poet Sabina, from Procházka. The opera is in 2 acts and takes as its subject matter the time of Bohemia's occupation by Otto of Brandenburg, after the death of Přemysl Ottokar II. " ("Durch Procházka erhielt ich endlich einen Operntext, und zwar vom Dichter Sabina. Die Oper ist in 2 Akten, und behandelt den Stoff zur Zeit der Besetzung Böhmens durch Otto von Brandenburg, nach dem Tode Přemisl Ottokar II.")

41 Smetana, [Diary 1862–1875], f. 3^v, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1099: 5th July [1863]. "I bought the lyrics to the comic operetta from Sabina, it had no title yet." ("5^{ho} července [1863]. Od Sabiny jsem si koupil text k operettě komické, neměla ještě jméno žádné.")

42 Smetana, [Diary 1862–1875], f. 6^v, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1099: "That year [1865] I finished my first comic opera, and I gave it the title 'Prodaná nevěsta' because the poet Sabina, who wrote the text, did not know what to call it." ("Ten rok [1865] jsem dohotovil první svojí komickou operu, a dal jsem jí sám jméno 'Prodaná nevěsta' proto že básník textu Sabina nevěděl jak ji pojmenovat.")

43 See Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2 (correspondence concerning the libretto of *Viola*), and vol. 3 (correspondence concerning the librettos of *Viola*, *Hubička*, *Tajemství* and *Čertova stěna*, as well as some other themes offered by Krásnohorská). For a complete edition of the surviving correspondence between Smetana and Krásnohorská, see Mirko Očadlík, *Eliška Krásnohorská – Bedřich Smetana. Vzájemná korespondence* (Prague: Topičova edice, 1940). For the manuscripts of the librettos for *Hubička*, *Čertova stěna* and *Viola* see Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1505, 1509, 1510.

shape.⁴⁴ The correspondence also contains offers of libretti by other authors, which Smetana rejected for aesthetic reasons or time constraints, and later for health reasons.

In many cases, the diary entries and information from letters also significantly supplement and refine the data concerning the chronology of Smetana's compositional process. Smetana usually dated the scores at the end of each volume, and, accordingly, we know when he completed the individual acts. Apart from a few exceptions, however, his sketches or piano extracts are not dated, and it is often the written documents that record when and in what time frame they were created.

Smetana also describes in his letters the problems he had to cope with while composing after becoming deaf. With prolonged mental exertion, the constant hum and noise in his head would become more intense, forcing him to interrupt his work:

But my hearing troubles—a nervous paralysis that is provoked by overexertion—prevents me from working for any longer period of time. If I am mentally active for more than one hour, namely when I am composing, a buzzing and roaring sets off in my head so intense that it is not even possible to consider continuing my work. – I can only work in short, interrupted time intervals.⁴⁵

He thus found it increasingly difficult to maintain the continuity of his musical ideas and the logic of his musical construction, and later his existing difficulties were compounded by dizziness: “I am working as hard as I can on our last opera, *Tajemství*, when the vertigo, which is more than ever troubling me, permits it. Over 80 pages of the score are finished, almost halfway through the first act [...].”⁴⁶

Starting with *Tajemství*, Smetana also began to find the complicated

44 See the surviving manuscripts of the librettos for *Prodaná nevěsta* (copy of Sabina's original libretto, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1492), *Dalibor*, *Libuše*, and *Dvě vdovy* (Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1494–1497, 1498–1500, 1501–1502). The original manuscripts of the librettos for *Braniboři v Čechách* and *Tajemství* are not available.

45 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Marie Blodková, June 20, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 294: “Mein Gehörleiden aber – eine durch Überanstrengung hervorgerufene nervöse Lähmung – verbietet mir jede länger dauernde Arbeit. Wenn ich länger als eine Stunde in Geistesthätigkeit bin, namentlich wenn ich komponire, so stellt sich ein so heftiges Sausen und Brausen im Kopfe ein, daß an eine Fortsetzung der Arbeit gar nicht zu denken ist. – Ich kann nur in kleinen abgebrochenen Zeitintervallen arbeiten.”

46 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Eliška Krásnohorská, October 2, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 317–318: “Pracuji jak mohu, a když totiž závrať, která teď mně víc než kdy souží, tomu dovolí, na naši poslední zpěvohře: “*Tajemství*” Přes 80 stránek je v partituru na čisto hotovo, skorem polovic prvního jednání [...]” See also Smetana's letters from the time of the composition of *Tajemství* to Josef Lev on January 4, 1878, to Krásnohorská on March 1, 1878, and to Robert Nittinger on April 10, 1878 (ibid. 353, 378, 398).

ensemble scenes quite exhausting—whereas in his previous operas he had managed them without any problems, they now required unusually great effort and concentration—but these difficulties did not affect the final shape of the work:

What always scares me in my work are the ensemble scenes. It must be laziness, perhaps also old age, that makes me shrink from such work! I cannot describe the feeling when I manage to complete a big scene like that, which is teeming with people! But I breathe freer again, and every part after it seems so easy.⁴⁷

Smetana's health problems gradually increased and his mental state also deteriorated:

My condition has worsened in general, and I am also mentally so depressed that I fear the worst. I'm afraid of—madness. I have become so forgetful that I have been sitting for hours, doing nothing, thinking of nothing but—my misfortune.⁴⁸

Smetana's pace of work slowed considerably after 1880. While both *Hubička* (1875–1876) and *Tajemství* (1877–1878) took him about a year from sketch to completion of the score, the composition of *Čertova stěna* took three years (1879–1882). He complained, “As I lost about a fortnight through my illness, I could not continue the opera *Čertova stěna* as quickly as I would have liked. [...] No opera has ever cost me so much time and trouble as this last one.”⁴⁹

Smetana's writings also consider the performance and reception of his operas. Before he joined the Prozatímní divadlo, his diaries and correspondence primarily document negotiations about the financial arrangements as well as the circumstances of the staging of *Braniboři v Čechách* and *Prodaná nevěsta*, which,

47 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Eliška Krásnohorská, October 20, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 328: “Čeho se při práci vždy lekám, jsou ensembové sceny. Musí to být lenost, snad take už stárí která mně před takovou prací hrozí! Ten pocit, když jsem s takovou velkou scénou hotov, kde se to osoby jen hemží, nemohu popsat! Ale dýchám zase volněji, a každé číslo na to se mi zda být tak lehounké.”

48 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Jan Neruda, February 25, 1879, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 509: “Můj stav se vůbec zhoršil, a jsem také duševně tak sklíčen, že se bojím toho nejhoršího. Mám strach před – šílenstvím. Stal jsem se tak zádumčiví, že již celé hodiny sedím, a nic nedělám, na nic nemyslím, než na – moje neštěstí.”

49 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Josef Srb, December 23, 1881, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/377: “Jelikož jsem nemocí svou asi 14 dní ztratil, nemohl jsem tak spěšně v opeře Čert. stěna pokračovat, jak bych si byl přál. [...] Vůbec žádná opera mne nestála tolik času a namáhání, jak tato poslední.”

in both cases, Smetana had to undertake himself.⁵⁰ In the case of *Dalibor* and *Dvě vdovy*, which were performed under his direction, no such information can be found in the diaries or correspondence. After he was no longer able to study and conduct his operas himself, Smetana's letters contain some instructions for the conductor or the director.⁵¹ In the case of *Libuše*, he was very concerned with expanding the chorus and orchestra, in view of *Libuše's* exceptional status and mission and because of the more demanding musical component:

Besides, all the other gentlemen singers, soloists as elders, clan chiefs, etc., in the choir and in ensembles will have to take part in the performance, for I am afraid that the present tiny size of the chorus would not be able to cope with so many counter-choruses. [...] Tell all the gentlemen in charge that I demand in every respect that all the roles and the chorus and orchestra be adequately filled.⁵²

At the time of composition, he also usually had an idea of the casting of individual roles and wrote some directly for specific singers.⁵³ He also actively participated in some rehearsals before the premieres.

Some other Czech opera companies and occasionally amateur companies expressed interest in Smetana's operas, especially *Prodaná nevěsta*, and Smetana negotiated the terms of transferring the performing rights in writing. As early as 1869, Pavel Švanda's theater company staged *Prodaná nevěsta* in

50 See Smetana, [Diary 1862–1875], f. 6^v–7^r, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1099; Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 112–114, 120–121.

51 See Bedřich Smetana, letter to Adolf Čech, October 19, 1876; instructions on the tempi of some items in *Hubička* (Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 201) and September 4, 1878; instructions for the direction of the beginning of scene 2 in act 2 of *Tajemství*, requirements for the composition of the orchestra (ibid., 428–429).

52 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Adolf Čech, January 2, 1881, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/211: "Ostatně musejí všickni ostatní pánové zpěváci, solisti, co kmety, léchové a. t. d. ve sboru a v ensemblech sebou oučinkovat, neb obávám se, že nynejší na počet hudinký sbor by tolik protisborů nemohl ani provzt. [...] Rekněte to všem rozhodujícím pánům že žádám v každém ohledu na dostatečném obsazení všech úloh a sboru a orchestru."

53 In *Hubička* he wrote the roles of Vendulka for Marie Sittová and Martinka for Betty Fibichová, see Bedřich Smetana, letter to Adolf Čech, November 30, 1877 and February 19, 1877 (Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 340, 270; S 217/200, 197). For the roles of Kalina and Bonifác in *Tajemství* he counted on Josef Lev and Karel Čech; see Bedřich Smetana, letter to Josef Lev, January 4, 1878 and to Eliška Krásnohorská on January 31, 1878 (ibid., 353, 363). In letters to Adolf Čech on January 2 and July 4, 1882, Smetana outlined his specific ideas about the casting of the roles in *Libuše* and *Čertova stěna* (Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/211, 218). With few exceptions, the theater respected his wishes.

Plzeň, and in the following years also performed it in other Czech towns.⁵⁴ In addition, in 1880 Švanda purchased the performing rights for *Hubička* from Smetana for his theater in Smíchov for three years, in 1881 for *Dvě vdovy*, and in the same year he negotiated the purchase of *Tajemství*, but they did not agree on a price.⁵⁵ In 1882, theater director František Pokorný purchased the performing rights to *Prodaná nevěsta* from Smetana for Plzeň.⁵⁶ *Prodaná nevěsta* and *Hubička* were also performed in Czech towns in 1878–1883 by Jan Pištěk's company.⁵⁷

While Smetana mostly agreed with local interested parties, offers to stage some of his operas abroad mostly came to nothing. As early as January 1867, Jakob Hössly, the principal conductor of the Polish theater in Lviv/Lemberg, was interested in *Prodaná nevěsta*, and in 1869 there were talks about its possible performance in Paris. Smetana expanded the opera with new vocal numbers and dances and sent a copy of the score to Paris, together with a piano-vocal score and a German translation of the libretto.⁵⁸ In 1871 the opera was to be staged at the theater in Graz, and in 1878 Felix Mottl, Kapellmeister of the Vienna Ringtheater, expressed interest in *Tajemství* and later in *Prodaná nevěsta*,⁵⁹ and in 1882 the director of the theater in Cologne was interested in *Prodaná nevěsta*.⁶⁰ *Prodaná nevěsta* received its first foreign performance on

54 For notes on individual performances, including royalties, see Smetana's list of performances of his own operas (Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1148), based on which they were later clearly arranged and supplemented by Josef Srb, *Zápisky o skladbách Smetanových dle poznámek skladatelových*, ms. 1882, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 488, sign. W 31/9.

55 See the contracts, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/42, 43, Pavel Švanda's letters to Smetana (*ibid.*, S 217/926–928) and especially Smetana's correspondence with Josef Srb, who handled these matters on his behalf in 1881 (*ibid.*, S 217/358–360, 363–365, 367–369, 882–887, 889–890).

56 Contract, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/39.

57 Records of individual performances including royalties, see note 53.

58 See Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 247–248, 262–264, 284–285.

59 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 159 (Lvov), 341–342, 343; 863 (Graz); vol. 3, 455, 460–461, 468–470 (Vienna). Smetana's letters to Mottl are known only from auction catalogues: *Printed and Manuscript Music. 28th May 1993* (London: Sotheby's, 1993), 170–171; *Music, Continental Printed Books and Manuscripts. Sotheby's London Auction Catalogue for the Sale Held in the Aeolian Hall on 1st–2nd December 1994* (London: Sotheby's, 1994), 129, 335. A piano-vocal score was not yet available for *The Secret*, so Smetana offered *The Bartered Bride*, which Mottl returned: "It is with a heavy heart that I send you back your beautiful work—with a heavy heart because I lack the strength to do it justice in performance at the Ring Theater." ("Mit Wehmuth sende ich Ihnen Ihr schönes Werk zurück, – mit Wehmuth, weil mir die Kräfte fehlen es am Ringtheater würdig aufzuführen.") (Felix Mottl, letter to Bedřich Smetana, March 16, 1879, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 520–521).

60 Josef Srb, letter to Bedřich Smetana, December 15, 1882, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/897.

January 11, 1871, in St. Petersburg, initiated by Czechs working at the Sankt-Peterburgskaja imperatorskaja opera (St. Petersburg Imperial Opera) at the time: the newly engaged bass Josef Paleček, who sang Kecal in Prague, and the principal conductor Eduard Nápravník. For that occasion, Smetana replaced the spoken prose with recitatives, thereby giving the opera its definitive shape. Paleček's letters from St. Petersburg contain important information about the preparations, the premiere, and the response to the work, including the unfavorable reaction of Russian critics.⁶¹ Czechs working in the local opera also played a significant role in the next foreign performance of *Prodaná nevěsta* in Zagreb on October 18, 1873.⁶² The correspondence also records in some detail the negotiations with Bernhard Pollini, director of the Hamburg Stadttheater (Municipal Theater), in 1881 about the performance of *Dvě vdovy* (premiered on December 28, 1881). Smetana was greatly assisted by Ludevít Procházka, who had moved to Hamburg in 1879 when his wife, the soprano Marta Procházková, was engaged by the local opera house. Procházka brought the opera to Pollini's attention at Smetana's instigation. The correspondence with Procházka and Pollini directly concerns not only the terms of the sale of the performing rights, but also the requirements for subsequent modifications to the opera during 1882, which were related to the parallel negotiations with the firm of Bote & Bock about the publication of a piano-vocal score. In the same year, Smetana also began corresponding with Pollini about a possible production of *Prodaná nevěsta* and *Hubička*, but they failed to agree on the terms.⁶³ At the end of July 1882 Ludevít Procházka followed his wife to a new engagement in Dresden; later that year he was involved in promising plans for a production of *Prodaná nevěsta*, but in the end it did not happen.⁶⁴

The reception of Smetana's operas is reflected in his writings with varying intensity. In his diaries, Smetana at least briefly recorded how the premieres or subsequent benefit performances of some of his operas went: what the attendance was, how many times he was given a curtain call, which items had to be encored, as well as wreaths and tributes, etc. Only about the premiere of *Dalibor* (1868), which was successful chiefly because of the elated atmosphere of the groundbreaking ceremony for the Národní divadlo (National Theater) of which it was a part, did he not record anything in detail. His sketchy diary entries of the last years also

61 See Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 277–281, 296–299, 304–306.

62 See *ibid.*, 456–457.

63 See the complete edition of Smetana's extant correspondence with Ludevít Procházka: Jan Löwenbach, *Bedřich Smetana a Dr. Ludevít Procházka. Vzájemná korespondence* (Prague: Umělecká beseda, 1914), 37–42, 47–71, 92–93, 103–104. For correspondence between Smetana and Pollini from 1881–1880 see S 217/530, 793–804.

64 *Ibid.*, 93–99, 103–104.

do not comment on the premieres of *Libuše* (1881) and *Čertova stěna*, whose unsuccessful premiere on October 29, 1882, Smetana commented on elsewhere:

The opera was sloppily produced. The cold forced the director, in defiance of my requests, to hold the extra rehearsals in the small theater. The bad set, the old costumes, the lack of rehearsals made me so angry that I was hard to placate. – They liked the music.⁶⁵

In correspondence up to 1874, reactions from the public and Smetana's own comments on responses to the performance appear rather sporadically, especially in connection with the extraordinary success of the first performance of *Braniboři v Čechách*⁶⁶ or with the performance of *Prodaná nevěsta* in St. Petersburg (1871).⁶⁷ The situation changed completely after he became deaf, and Smetana began to be increasingly perceived by the public as the chief representative of the nation's music. The success of *Hubička* (premiered on November 7, 1876) contributed to this perception, which was first manifested by a national celebration at the benefit performance for Smetana on November 14. The celebration at the one hundredth performance of *Prodaná nevěsta* was even more impressive. In addition to onstage celebrations with tributes and wreaths, dozens of congratulatory telegrams and letters arrived from individuals, associations, and communities all over Bohemia celebrating Smetana as the creator of national opera.⁶⁸

Until 1874, Smetana paid virtually no attention to the publication of his operas due to his heavy workload, and only after he became deaf did he become more interested, for existential reasons, in publishing his works, including operatic piano-vocal scores and individual vocal numbers with piano accompaniment, or even selections from several works for the sake of popularization. What he did

65 List of his own compositions, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1147: "Opera byla nedbale vypravená. Zima nutila ředitele, vzdor mých žádostech, nechat operu do malého divadla, k forcirovaným skouškám. Špatná výprava, staré kostumi nedostatek skoušek mně rozlobili tak, že jsem jen z tíží se nechal uchlácholit. – Hudba se libila."

66 See Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 112–117, 123–128.

67 Vladimir Izmailovich Sreznnevsky and especially Josef Paleček, letters to Bedřich Smetana, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 319–333, 337–340.

68 A copy of telegrams Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany; Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 202–241 (telegrams regarding *Hubička*). For a detailed description of the celebrations, including a list of the wreaths presented, the tributes and the texts of most of the telegrams, see *Národní listy* 16, no. 316 (November 15, 1876): [3] (*Hubička*), *Dalibor* 4, no. 14 (May 10, 1882): 105–106 (*Prodaná nevěsta*). See also Olga Mojžíšová, "Čestné finanční dary Bedřichu Smetanovi," in *Miscellanea z výroční konference České společnosti pro hudební vědu 2008. Fenomén mecenášství v hudební kultuře*, ed. Jitka Bajgarová (Prague: Česká společnost pro hudební vědu / Etnologický ústav Akademie věd České republiky and Nakladatelství Agora, 2010), 78–83.

manage to publish was brought out by local publishers, who usually also initiated these editions. In 1872 a piano-vocal score of *Prodaná nevěsta* was published by the newly founded Matice hudební as its first gift for its members, and as the first ever piano-vocal score of a Czech opera.⁶⁹ Smetana's correspondence documents in considerable detail the back and forth surrounding the publication of the piano-vocal score of *Hubička*. As early as the end of 1876, the lawyer and arts patron Jan Strakatý offered to finance its publication, but due to his worsening financial situation he abandoned the plan in 1878.⁷⁰ In 1879 Matice hudební and the publisher František Augustin Urbánek also showed interest, and the piano-vocal score was finally published by Urbánek in 1880.⁷¹ From May 1879 Smetana had an exclusive contract with Urbánek for the publication of his compositions, which also included duets from his operas with piano accompaniment.⁷² In 1875, the publishing house of Emanuel Starý published the score and a four-hand piano reduction of the overture from *Libuše*, which Smetana saved for the opening of the Národní divadlo nine years after the opera's completion (1872). On that occasion it was on Smetana's initiative, as he was planning to send copies abroad for performance.⁷³ Matice hudební exceptionally published a piano-vocal score of *Libuše* in May 1881 before the premiere.⁷⁴ Smetana's attempts to establish links with German publishers ended in failure. He had hoped that publishing in Germany would make it easier for his operas to reach foreign countries and earn him higher fees, but as early as 1874, Breitkopf & Härtel refused his request for them to publish the overtures to *Prodaná nevěsta*, *Libuše*,

69 The piano-vocal score was published without recitatives and with a dedication to the younger brother of Tsar Alexander II of Russia, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, related to his interest in the opera at its performance in St. Petersburg. Regarding its publication see Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 371–373, 381–382, 411–413, 455–456.

70 For the correspondence with Jan Strakatý in the period 1876–1878 see Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 253–255, 274–275, 389–390, 403–404.

71 See Smetana's correspondence with Urbánek in the period 1879–1880 (Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 514, 521–525, 583–584, S 217, 492, 2276, 2279, 2290) and the publishing contract of March 8, 1880 (Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/36).

72 Contract of May 14, 1879 (Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/32). The duets from the operas published by Urbánek as *Zpěvy z oper s průvodem piana* (*Arias from operas with piano accompaniment*) include the first and third duets of Ludiše and Junoš from *Braniboři v Čechách* (1880) and the duets of Jitka and Vítěk (1880) and Milada and Dalibor (1881) from *Dalibor*.

73 See Bedřich Smetana, letter to Emanuel Starý, February 13, 1875 (Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 41). Along with *Libuše*, Smetana offered for publication the score of the overture to *Prodaná nevěsta*, but Starý did not publish it.

74 Regarding the contract with Matice hudební, see Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/530, 988, 1005.

and *Dvě vdovy*.⁷⁵ During his stay in Hamburg, Ludevít Procházka contacted the publishers Hugo Pohle and Bote & Bock on Smetana's behalf and participated in the negotiations himself. Smetana entered into negotiations with Pohle—who had published the Piano Trio in G Minor, op. 15 in 1880—regarding *Dvě vdovy* and subsequently *Prodaná nevěsta* and *Hubička* (1880–1881), but they parted on bad terms.⁷⁶ After the premiere of *Dvě vdovy* in Hamburg, Hugo Bock intended to publish a piano-vocal score of it, and Ludevít Procházka again acted as mediator between him and the composer. However, because of requests from the publisher and from the director Pollini for modifications to the libretto and further changes in the opera, including the addition of new items, which were Pollini's conditions for further performances of the opera and which in some cases were unacceptable to Smetana, negotiations dragged on⁷⁷ and Smetana did not live to see the publication in 1892.

From 1866 onwards, Smetana also kept systematic records in his diaries of individual performances of his operas and their financial returns, i.e., royalties and income from benefit performances, not only from the Prozatímní divadlo but also from performances outside Prague. After he became deaf, he permitted the theater to perform his operas free of charge in exchange for an annual salary of 1,200 gulden and the right to a profit share and benefits only for newly delivered works. Nevertheless, he had to engage repeatedly in sometimes quite complicated renegotiations of these conditions with the theater management.⁷⁸ The diaries, together with his list of performances of his own operas, including their financial returns,⁷⁹ provide an almost complete and reasonably accurate picture of the frequency of all his operas and their financial value. According to these records, *Prodaná nevěsta* was the most performed and also the most financially successful, followed by *Hubička*, composed ten years later, while the other operas were more or less in line with the average opera runs. Overall, however, Smetana was the second-most performed opera composer at the Prozatímní divadlo (after Offenbach).⁸⁰ The fees for the publication of his operas are also mostly documented in his diaries and correspondence.

75 See Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 493–496; Smetana's offer is known only from the auction catalogue *Musik-Autographen. Sammlung Max Reis und anderer Besitz. Auktion in Basel am 8. Oktober 1994* (Erasmushaus, Auktion 67 / J. A. Stargardt – Katalog 657) (Basel: Erasmushaus / Berlin: J. A. Stargardt, 1994), 132–133.

76 For Smetana's correspondence with Hugo Pohle see Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/530, 996–999, also Löwenbach, *Bedřich Smetana a Dr. Ludevít Procházka*, 111–114 (Pohle's letters to Smetana).

77 See *ibid.*, 72–92.

78 See footnote 39.

79 Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1148.

80 For details on this matter see Olga Mojžíšová, “... I Value my Compositions a Bit More Highly than the Theatre Directorate Does...’ The Frequency of Performances of Smetana's Operas at

From the early 1860s, when Smetana's intensive involvement in the Czech music scene began, opera became his main mission in life. As a composer, he clearly favored opera, largely to the detriment of his other work. The opera scene of the Prozatímní divadlo was the most important area of his activity in Prague's musical life, and he remained connected with it through his works even after his period as conductor came to an end. Opera provided him with a stable livelihood, as it was his most important and, after becoming deaf, de facto his only permanent source of income.

Translated from the Czech by Gerald Turner.

Bedřich Smetana as an Opera Critic*

1. Introduction

Bedřich Smetana's musical activity was multifaceted, and therefore the significance of his legacy for future generations should not be limited to his compositions, but also the profound influence he had on other areas of musical life in Prague. Smetana's work as a conductor, performer, and teacher, as well as his activities as a member of associations, significantly spurred Prague's musical culture, especially from the 1860s onward. Lesser known was his work as a music critic, first in Gothenburg in the 1850s and then especially in the early 1860s in Prague. This study focuses on Smetana's reviews of opera performances at the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater) that appeared in *Národní listy* between May 1864 and April 1865.

Smetana's critical writings were already being studied by scholars at the end of the nineteenth century. At least three major book treatments are worth mentioning. In his book *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu* (*Bedřich Smetana and His Struggle for Modern Czech Music*), Otakar Hostinský included a chapter entitled "Smetana hudebním kritikem" ("Smetana the Music Critic")¹ in which he printed some articles and excerpts from reviews and characterized Smetana as a strict critic who had a clear idea of the artistic direction of the Prague music scene.

In 1920 Jan Reisser explored the subject more deeply in a collection of Smetana's writings called *Články a referáty 1862–1865* (*Articles and Reviews 1862–1865*).² Reisser dealt comprehensively with Smetana's newspaper articles about music, printing all the articles in full and grouping them thematically, showing that Smetana dealt with three main areas: opera performances at the

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1 Otakar Hostinský, "Smetana the Music Critic" in *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu* (Prague: J. Laichter, 1901), 35–93.

2 Bedřich Smetana, *Články a referáty 1862–1865*, ed. Jan Reisser (Prague: Nákladem české grafické unie, 1920).

Prozatímní divadlo, concert life, and newly published music. Thanks to this organization, for example, it is obvious how many operas in the repertoire were Italian, French, etc. Reviews of several performances of the same work are closely juxtaposed, thus enabling a comparison of how Smetana's critical view of their performance evolved.

V. H. Jarka's book *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany 1858–1865* (*The Critical Works of Bedřich Smetana 1858–1865*),³ published in 1948, is more extensive and based on more complex research. Jarka arranged Smetana's articles chronologically and he included all the composer's available texts, starting with two reviews from the Swedish period (1858 and 1861).⁴ Among Smetana's reviews of musical life in Prague, there are articles in *Slavoj* (1862)⁵ and reviews of published music in the "Critical Supplement" to *Národní listy* (1863–1864),⁶ three features under the heading "Opera," and his regular reviews for *Národní listy* (1864–1865).⁷ Jarka's book is valuable not only for its critical assessment of existing publications on the subject, but also for his extensive annotation of each article or review. He analyzes Smetana's thinking in the context of events of the time, provides information on the composers of the works performed, and gives details, for example, of the personalities of the art world of the period mentioned in Smetana's texts. He also describes concert life and operatic productions in Prague, including the period of Smetana's own activity as principal conductor at the Prozatímní divadlo. Jarka dealt, among other things, with the cipher that Smetana used when writing for *Národní listy*.⁸

In the early 1860s Smetana engaged in a variety of activities in Prague. The year 1862 marked a significant turning point, bringing to a definitive end the period of his work abroad, and Smetana abandoned his career as a piano virtuoso. Smetana wanted to establish himself firmly, both existentially and socially, in the

3 Václav Hanno Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany 1858–1865* (Prague: Nakladatelství Pražské akciové tiskárny, 1948).

4 Bedřich Smetana, ["Missa Solemnis od J. Čapka"], *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfarts Tidning* no. 292 (December 16, 1858), in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 31–35; Bedřich Smetana, ["Hudba – koncerty"] *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfarts Tidning* (February 1861) in Jarka *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 35–36.

5 Bedřich Smetana, "O našich koncertech," *Slavoj* 1, no. 7 (October 1, 1862), in Jarka 1948, 37–43.

6 Bedřich Smetana, in *Národní listy* 1, no. 1 (November 5, 1863), in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 43–54.

7 Bedřich Smetana's articles in *Národní listy* are included in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 57–182.

8 Bedřich Smetana was not alone in publishing articles of music criticism in *Národní listy* in the aforementioned period, although his contributions were the most numerous. Jarka confirms that Bedřich Smetana used the cipher A, Jindřich Hanuš Böhm, a lawyer and librettist, and a follower of František Pivoda, probably used the cipher B, and Dr. Ludevít Procházka, Smetana's pupil and an admirer, used the cipher C.

musical life of Prague and remain in the Czech lands for good.⁹ With Ferdinand Heller, he founded a music institute, which was located in the Lažanský Palace on the embankment,¹⁰ and he began to get involved in social life. He became the choirmaster of the Hlahol choral society and co-founded the *Umělecká beseda* artists' association, where he became director of the music department in 1863. In the spring of 1865 he unsuccessfully applied for the post of director of the Prague Conservatory.¹¹ At that time he was involved in many cultural activities and organized a number of concerts in which he also performed, as a result of which he started to become a well-known figure in Prague.

Smetana already hoped to become the first music director of the Prozatímní divadlo when he returned from his activity in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1861.¹² However, it took another five years for his efforts to come to fruition. In 1863, when the contract of Franz Thomé, the incumbent director of the German and Czech theaters, was coming to an end, the Music Department of the *Umělecká beseda* proposed in a letter to Provincial Committee Intendant František Ladislav Rieger, Chairman of the Committee for the Establishment of a Czech National Theater in Prague, that a man devoted to art and the nation should

9 Bedřich Smetana's diary 1861/62, 2. V. 1862, 24: "Leider ist meine Heimath so sehr in mein Herz gewachsen, daß ich nur dort mich wohl fühle, und ihr Alles opfern will. [...] Mitte Mai bin ich wieder in Prag zurückgekommen, um daselbst schon zu bleiben." See also Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil, "Bedřich Smetana 1863–1874," in *Bedřich Smetana. Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1 (1840–1862), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague: Národní muzeum / Koniasch Latin Press, 2016), *85.

10 Today opposite the Národní divadlo (National Theater),

11 The vacancy was advertised after the departure of Johann Friedrich Kittl. See Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil, "Bedřich Smetana 1863–1874," in *Bedřich Smetana, Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 2 (1863–1874), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague: Národní muzeum / Koniasch Latin Press, 2020), *12.

12 He notes in his diary from 1864, f. 15v: "Ever since he learned that I was trying to become principal conductor at the Czech theater, Maýr has been furious with me. Rieger no doubt told him, for I paid him a visit as intendant of the Czech theater as soon as I moved from Sweden to Bohemia, and I told him my intention, why I had left Sweden, where I was earning so much money, and come to the Czech lands where my livelihood was uncertain." ("Maýr od té doby, co se dozvěděl, že já snažím se státi kapelníkem při českém divadle, zuří proti mně. Rieger mu to bezpochyby vzdělil, neb u něj, hned co intendanta českého divadla jsem byl s návštěvou hned jak jsem se ze Švéd odstěhoval do Čech, a vzdělil jsem mu můj úmysl, proč vlastně jsem Švédsko, kde jsem tolik vydělával, opustil, a do Čech na nejisté živobýti přišel.") See also Mojžíšová and Pospíšil, "Bedřich Smetana 1840–1862," in *Bedřich Smetana, Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 1 (1840–1862), ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague: National Museum and KLP, 2016), *84–85.

be appointed as director.¹³ This was to be none other than Smetana,¹⁴ although Jan Nepomuk Maýr remained as principal conductor. Fundamental changes took place only in September 1866, after the establishment of the Theater Association, which was entrusted with the management of the Prozatímní divadlo by the Provincial Committee, and Smetana was elected the principal conductor.¹⁵ He remained in this position until the onset of his deafness in 1874. His extensive knowledge, insight, and understanding of works in their entirety far surpassed that of his predecessor Maýr, although he allegedly did not have the same attention to detail in preparation of operas.¹⁶

2. Smetana's Literary Activity as a Music Critic

Smetana took up the job of music reviewer at a time when he was looking for a settled position in the Prague artistic milieu, and his main source of income was teaching at the music institute.¹⁷ This happened shortly after a separate theater column was introduced in *Národní listy*. Before that, reviews of performances (drama, opera, concerts) were included in the daily news. There are records of over a hundred reviews and articles. The majority of them (seventy-five) are reviews of opera performances; a further twenty-nine reviews are of ballet

- 13 Smetana clearly expresses his attitude to the music direction of the Czech theater, and what impact he could have on the public if he were given the post of musical director in a letter to Isaac Philip Valentin, April 20, 1865, Gothenburg, in Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 2, 75–76 (emphasis in original): “In terms of national priorities, the position of the conductor is probably the most important at the Czech Theater, for one has an immediate effect on the audience in the broadest sense and can exercise great influence when it comes to the refinement of artistic taste as well as the art form itself, even in the first row. It is therefore understandable that I would be most inclined to accept this position.” (“In nationaler Hinsicht ist die Kapellmeisterstelle beim böhmischen Theater wohl die wichtigste; denn hier wirkt man unmittelbar auf das Publikum im weitesten Sinne, und kann auf die Veredlung des Kunstgeschmacks sowohl als der Kunstrichtung selbst in erster Reihe den größten Einfluß ausüben. Daher ist es erklärlich, wenn mir *dieser* Posten gerade am meisten zusagen würde.”)
- 14 Correspondence HMUB – Rieger, F. L.: 20. 4. 1863. See also Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu*, 23.
- 15 At that time the Prozatímní divadlo had three conductors. The second was the chorus master and conductor Adolf Čech, and the third was Karel Šebor.
- 16 It is generally known that Smetana was quite critical of Maýr's work as principal conductor. He himself changed many things in this role, but he adopted some of the failings of previous productions. Regarding Smetana's stagings of foreign operas, his directorial activity and the response to his newspaper activity, see Mojžíšová and Pospíšil, “Bedřich Smetana 1863–1874,” *23–24.
- 17 It is unknown who obtained the post for Smetana.

performances, concerts and sheet music. Some reviews mention more than one work, as they were performed in a single evening (or only sections of them).

Although his diary entries and correspondence from this period are already in Czech, Smetana did not feel linguistically competent enough to write his reviews in Czech. Several drafts have survived, all written in German,¹⁸ as have newspaper clippings that Smetana had saved. Jarka states that the Smetana estate in the Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany contains eighteen reviews and two articles about public musical life. So far twelve have been processed, the rest are housed in unprocessed holdings.¹⁹ The manuscripts Smetana submitted to the editorial offices of *Národní listy* have not yet been traced.²⁰ Reviews were always published two days after the performance, an impressive speed considering that Smetana wrote them in German, requiring them to be translated before being mailed and printed.

3. Opera at the Prozatímní divadlo

Between May 2, 1864, and April 15, 1865, i.e., during the period when Smetana was regularly contributing to *Národní listy*, thirty-four operas were performed at the Prozatímní divadlo. Smetana attendend many performances: he reviewed twenty-nine of them, and he saw many of them repeatedly, so he wrote reviews of several performances of the same opera. He attended about half of the 149 evening shows.

Smetana's work as a critic is interesting from several points of view. He expresses his opinions openly and directly. The criticism is often complimentary, especially regarding singers' performances. However, he could be quite critical when he was trying to present as accurate a report as possible, even to his own detriment; a truthful reflection was more important to him than good relations with the theater management. The articles also show that Smetana had an excellent grasp of European operatic events and performance standards in other countries. The main themes that Smetana deals with in his reviews are essential for a better understanding of his critical thinking about musical theater. They also reflect the strengths and limitations of theater operation at the time. In view of the extent of Smetana's reviewing activity, only examples that are relevant to a certain issue are given for each topic.

The main contribution of Smetana's intensive year-long activity as a critic is the detailed mapping of the repertoire performed in the Prozatímní divadlo. The graph below shows all the operas that were performed at the Prozatímní

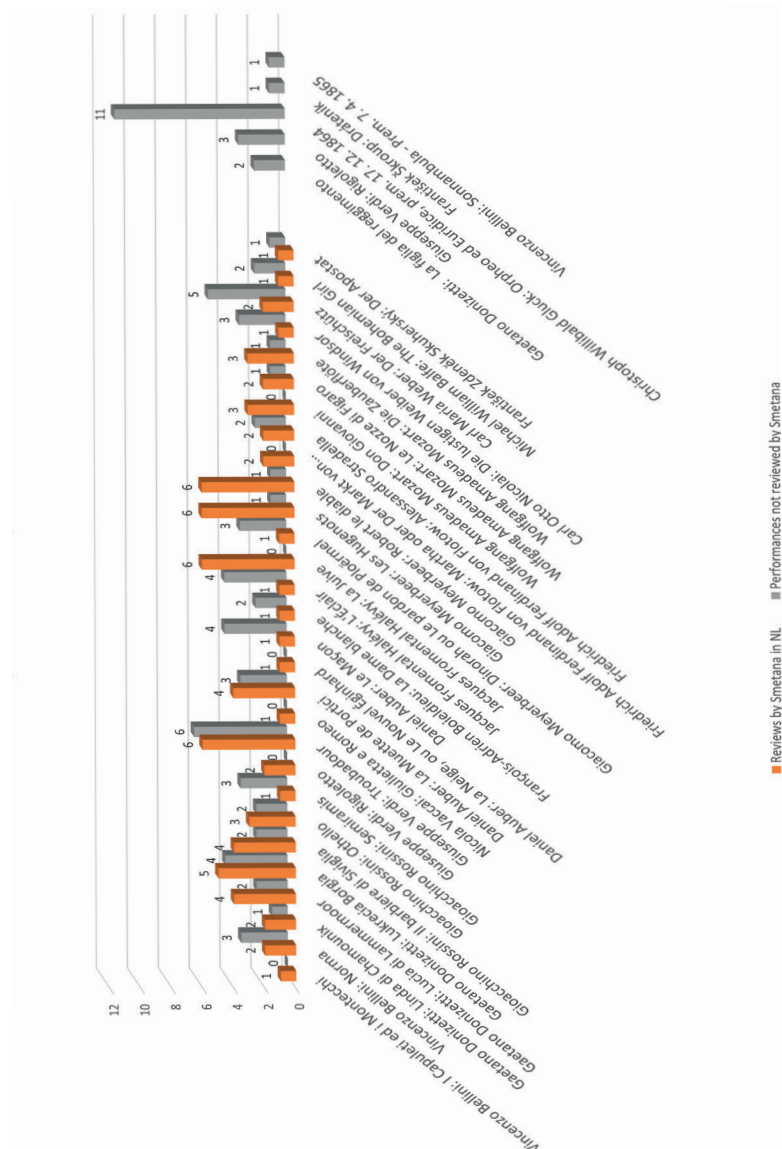
18 Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1151-1157.

19 Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/1655-1666. Other unsorted clippings: inv. no. 690 a 691.

20 The editorial archive is stored in the Muzeum literatury, Prague, archive file no. 1159. The file consists of 7 boxes, condition: unsorted.

divadlo during this period (table 6).²¹ The orange columns indicate the number of reviews that Smetana wrote. The grey columns represent performances that Smetana did not review.

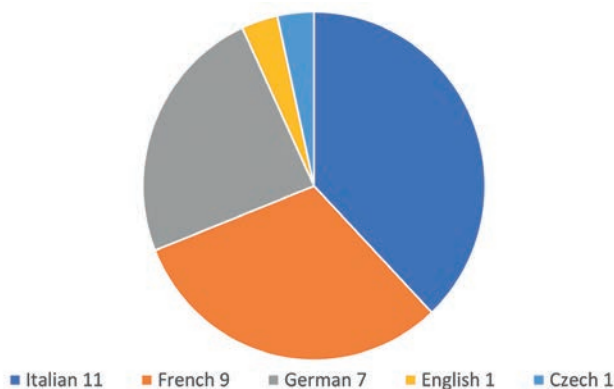
Table 6: Operas performed in the Prozatímní divadlo (April 30, 1864–April 15, 1865)



21 Detailed list of the repertoire in chronological order by day. See Václav Štěpán and Markéta Trávníčková, *Prozatímní divadlo 1862–1883*, 2 vol. (Prague: Academia, 2006). For an overview of performances during Smetana's period as a critic, see vol. 1, 273–290.

It is clear from the overview that Italian and French operas predominated, but there are also German titles, one Irish opera and just one opera by a Czech composer (table 7).

Table 7: Nationalities of composers of operas performed at the Prozatímní divadlo, reviewed by Bedřich Smetana



The principal conductor at that time was Maýr, who had a different approach to choosing repertoire and a different way of communicating it to the audience than Smetana. It is therefore not surprising that Smetana is critical of the theater's dramaturgy in his texts. He considered the repertoire to be limited, and he repeatedly expressed concern about Maýr's preference for Italian opera:

[...] why are we being presented with just Italian music, even using our own resources? – Do we not understand who benefits from such an approach? Is it art, the public or the management? Certainly not the former two, and the management would benefit if this course were finally abandoned. The endless repetition of operas, such as *Montechi* [Vincenzo Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*] or *Belizar* [Gaetano Donizetti's *Belisario*], which have long since been put to a well-deserved rest by almost all theaters, testifies to the peculiar artistic aspirations of our opera management.²²

22 Bedřich Smetana, [Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucrezia Borgia*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 118 (May 2, 1864): 1, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 57: "[...] k čemu i s vlastními silami stále jen italská hudba se nám předvádí? Nepochopujeme, komu má takové počínání si sloužiti, umění či obecnstvu aneb ředitelstvu? Prvním dvěma zajisté ne, a prospěch ředitelstva by toho žádal, aby se konečně od této dráhy upustilo. Věčné opakování se zpěvoher, jako na př. *Montechi* [Vincenzo Bellini, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*] aneb *Belizar* [Gaetano Donizetti, *Belisario*], které téměř ode všech divadel již dávno dány byly na zasloužený odpočinek, svědčí o podivné umělecké snaze naší operní režie."

On several occasions, Smetana commented on the lack of variety among the items performed and made no secret of the fact that he would have liked to see more operas in the repertoire:²³

We have heard “Norma” to our hearts’ content, and in such a short time in succession, that we marvel at the theatrical management’s lack of consideration for the audience. Is it not possible to avoid the deadening monotony of the repertoire, which in the end must inevitably deter the audience?²⁴

In addition to the lack of variety in the repertoire, Smetana highlighted the artistic quality of the operas and the inappropriate selection of some of them:

As regards freshness of thoughts, originality, romantic charm, sincere and conscientious work, and rich imagination, “Robert [le diable]” is far superior and truly opened a new epoch in operatic literature. Already in the “Huguenots” lie the germs of the later decline of Meyerbeer’s operatic music, the decline of a style created by himself, which eventually had to lead to a thorough reform in order to return to naturalness and truth.²⁵

The degree to which the issue of repertoire selection troubled Smetana is often evident from the ironic tone of his reviews:

- 23 Thirty-four opera titles at the Prozatímní divadlo in one season was no small number; in comparison, the actual repertoire of the National Theater in Prague is around thirty operas per season. The fact that Smetana refers to a limited repertoire is evidence of his artistic exigency, but also of an unrealistic notion of what was feasible. In the period when he himself was principal conductor, between eleven and twenty-four operas a year were staged. The benefit during his tenure, however, was the variety of works selected, with an emphasis on Czech and Slavic composers.
- 24 Bedřich Smetana, [Vincenzo Bellini, *Norma*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 138 (May 23, 1864): 1, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 66: “Slyšeli jsme ‘Normu’ již až do sytosti a to v tak krátké době za sebou, že se divíme té nešetrnosti, kterou divadelní režie naproti obecnstvu provádí. Což nelze se vyhnouti té uměřující jednotvárnosti repertoiru, která konečně obecnstvo jenom odstrašiti musí?”
- 25 Bedřich Smetana, [Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Les Hugenots*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 300 (November 5, 1864): 3, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 126: “Co do svěžesti myšlének, původnosti, romantického kouzla, upřímné svědomitosti práce a bohaté fantasmie stojí ‘Robert’ mnohem výše a utvořil opravdu novou epochu v operní literatuře. V Hugenotech leží již zárodky pozdější kleslé Meyerbeerovské hudby operní, úpadku slohu, jím samým stvořeného, který konečně k důkladné reformě, k návratu k přirozenosti a pravdě vésti musel.”

“La Neige” by Auber. Who introduced this weak Singspiel into our repertoire we do not know; but whoever it was, we owe him little thanks [...] – The plot is also of scant interest [...] It should be wished a well-deserved rest, lest our patience be longer abused.²⁶

Comparing the operas performed under Maýr to those under Smetana as the principal conductor shows that Smetana kept many operas in the repertoire. He simply realized that he was unable to change many of the previous shortcomings that he had criticized in 1860s. Apart from the inclusion of Czech and Slavic operas, which marked a turning point in the development of Czech musical theater, the repertoire of the Prozatímní divadlo did not change significantly.

The artistic conception of the staging of operas and directorial interventions are another frequent topics of Smetana’s reviews. The texts testify to customary staging practice at the time, such as making frequent cuts and omitting even essential parts of operas:

It is incomprehensible to us why in the fourth act, in the prison scene, the chorus behind the stage was once more omitted! – It makes the entire scene completely meaningless! – For it is only the cries of the people gathered outside the prison that truly convinces Eleazar to take his revenge.²⁷

The tone of individual articles confirms that Smetana deliberately criticized his opponent Maýr as a leading personality of the theater without mentioning his name. He did not use the public press for personal attacks, but argued in an informed manner from an artistic point of view:

There is little we can say in praise of the opera “The Barber of Seville” on this occasion. It is always mortifying to see ingenious works torn to pieces and disfigured, with neither the dialogue nor the vocal part remaining

- 26 Bedřich Smetana, [Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, *La Neige ou Le Nouvel Eginard*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 202 (July 27, 1864): 2, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 96: “Sníh od Aubera. Kdo slabou zpěvohru tuto přivedl do našeho repertoiru, nevíme; ale ať to byl kdokoli, jsme mu za to málo povděční. [...] – Děj jest taktéž málo zajímavým. [...] Mělo by se jí popřáti zaslouženého klidného odpočinku, aby nezneužívalo se déle naší trpělivosti.”
- 27 Bedřich Smetana, [Fromental Halévy, *La Juive*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 126 (May 10, 1864): 3, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 62: “Nepochopitelným jest nám, proč ve čtvrtém jednání v scéně žalární vynechán byl zase sbor za jevištěm! – Celý ten výjev stává se tím úplně bezsmyslným! – Neboť křikem lidu před žalářem se shluknuvšího, utvrdí se teprv Eleazar patřičně v úmyslu svém, že se pomstí.”

intact, not to mention the arbitrariness with which some beautiful items are omitted.²⁸

Because a visit to the theater was a social event in those days, the program of the whole evening was often subordinate to a desire for high attendance, even if it was to the detriment of the artistic quality. Smetana therefore takes umbrage at the combination of different works in one performance:

Mozart's "Don Giovanni" [...]. What a pendant has been added to this masterpiece, to this musical monument by popular demand as the announcement said (?!) [sic] the last act of "I Capuleti e i Montecchi" by Vaccai! We have no words to properly describe this lack of taste [...] Nothing else can follow Mozart's "Don Giovanni" [...]. If some individuals expressed the wish to be entertained by Vaccai after Mozart's music, the artistic management of our theater should have paid little heed to it and not run the risk of being suspected of having so little artistic taste itself.²⁹

Another important aspect of the reviews is Smetana's assessment of the performers who appeared at the Prozatímní divadlo during this period (local or guest), as well as the standard of their artistic performances and the monitoring of their vocal development. He often comments in detailed and expert language. Considering that the reviews were published in the daily press, one might wonder, from today's perspective, to what extent they were understood by readers at the time:

- 28 Bedřich Smetana, [Gioachino Rossini, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 159 (June 14, 1864): 2, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 76: "O zpěvohře 'Lazebník sevillský' nemůžeme tenkrát mnoho chvalitebného říci. Bývá vždy trapno dívat se na to, jak geniální díla trhají se na zohavené kousky, není ani dialog, ani zpěvní část nezůstane celkem, nic nehledě na libovůli, s jakouž jednotlivá krásná čísla se vynechávají."
- 29 Bedřich Smetana, [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni*. Vaccai: *I Capuletti e I Montecchi*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 191 (July 16, 1864): 3, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 90: "'Don Juan' od Mozarta [...]. K tomuto mistrovskému dílu, k tomuto hudebnímu pomníku přidán co přívěšek, jak ohlášení pravidlo na všeobecnou žádost(?) [sic] poslední akt z 'Montecchi a Capuletti' [sic] dle Vaccae! – Nemáme slov, abychom tento nedostatek vkusu náležitě pojmenovali [...]. Po Mozartově Don Juanu nemůže nic více následovati [...]. Jestliže jednotlivci vyslovili přání, aby po Mozartově hudbě pobavili se Vaccaiovou, nemělo artistické ředitelství našeho divadla pranic na to dbáti a bylo by se nepřivedlo v podezření, že samo má tak málo uměleckého vkusu."

Although we hold Miss Brenner³⁰ in high esteem as a coloratura singer, we must confess that the staccato of her voice is better trained than the legato, especially in the fast diatonic and chromatic scales, which often sound as if they have merged. We have also observed that the trill in the two-line octave is almost always formed with a minor third, but in the one-line octave it is always formed correctly and cleanly with a second.³¹

Another common feature of performances at the time was the audience's reaction to the singers' performances (people often went to the theatre "for a particular singer"). If they were especially good, they were applauded back, and the singer might be called upon to repeat some arias several times. Smetana was accustomed to this, but he could not help remarking on more than one occasion that too many such interruptions disturbed the opera as a whole. He also repeatedly commented on the composition of the orchestra and the artistic performances. The following is an instance when he did not conceal his uncompromising opinion:

No one really stands out in this opera, because one sings like the other. We must therefore make a summary judgment, and we only wish that our singers were relieved of these tedious tasks. The bass drum in the orchestra could spare our ears more; it is not pleasant when in a closed space the bass drum has such a solo that one cannot even hear the actual music.³²

Another topic that Smetana addressed on more than one occasion was the translation of librettos. It is obvious that the question of the quality of translations was a burning issue in this period. There was a tendency to translate operas

30 Jenny [Johanna] Brenner (1828–1878) was a Hungarian coloratura singer who performed regularly on Prague opera stages (both German and Czech) from 1856. During the period when František Liegert was the director of the Prozatímní divadlo, she appeared as a guest in a total of thirty-eight operas.

31 Bedřich Smetana, [Gioachino Rossini, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 128 (May 12, 1864): 3, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 63: "Ač sl. Brennerové co koloraturní zpěvačky velmi sobě vážíme, musíme předce vyznati, že staccato jejího hlasu jest vycvičenější než legato, zvláště v rychlých diatonických a chromatických škálách, které pak znějí často jakoby splynulé. Shledali jsme také, že trilek v dvoučárkované oktávě, tvoří téměř vždy s malou tercií, v jednočárkované oktávě však vždy správně a čistě se secundou."

32 Bedřich Smetana, [Michael William Balfe: *The Bohemian Girl*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 232 (August 27, 1864): 2, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 104: "V této zpěvohře vlastně nikdo nevyniká, poněvadž zpívá jeden jako druhý. Musíme tedy dáti úhrnkový úsudek a přáli bychom si jen, aby naši zpěváci zproštěni byli těchto nudných úloh. V orchestru mohl by velký buben našich uší více šetřiti; není to právě příjemné, když v uzavřeném místě velký buben takové má solo, že člověk nemůže ani vlastní hudbu slyšeti."

so that people could understand the text; however, it was not the established practice for an opera to be sung entirely in one language. It was therefore not uncommon for audiences to hear an opera in a combination of several languages due to the frequent guest appearances by foreign soloists:

Miss Zawiszanka³³ gave a meritorious performance alongside the guests. She sang in Czech only in the second act with Leporello, otherwise in Italian. It was of no consequence if she sang one character more or less in Italian, since half of the performers sang in Italian, half in Czech.³⁴

Smetana's reviews dealt not only with the question of appropriate dramaturgy, but also with certain problems concerning the daily operation of the theater, such as a sudden, unannounced change of program:

"Der Freischütz" was performed instead of "The Magic Flute." No one was aware of this change, even when they were entering the theater, and even then many were astonished to hear, instead of the familiar sounds of the overture to the "Magic Flute," the equally famous ones of the "Freischütz." We frankly did not care at the time whether this or that opera was performed, for both are dear and precious to us, so long as no inferior piece takes the place of the classical work.³⁵

A prominent and recurring theme is Smetana's emphasis on the inadequate space that the Prozatímní divadlo offered. He was bothered by the small size of the theater, which could accommodate 1,200 spectators,³⁶ and he stressed the inadequate size of the stage and the backstage facilities. He appealed for the early

33 Helena Zawiszanka (1834–1902) was a Polish mezzo-soprano very popular with the Prague audience. She worked in Warsaw and Lviv. She was a member of the Prozatímní divadlo from May 1864 to June 1865, i.e., throughout Smetana's time as an opera critic.

34 Bedřich Smetana, [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 191 (July 16, 1864): 3, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 91: "Sl. Zawiszanka záslužně počínala si vedle hostů. Zpívala jen v druhém jednání s Leporellem česky, ostatně italsky. Zpívala-li o jednu osobu více či méně v italské řeči, nemělo tenkrát pražádného významu, jelikož polovička účinkujících italsky, polovička česky zpívala."

35 Bedřich Smetana, [Carl Maria von Weber, *Der Freischütz*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 275 (October 11, 1864): 3, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 114: "Místo 'Kouzelné flétny' dával se 'Střelec kouzelník'. Nikdo nevěděl o této změně ani, když vstupoval již do divadla, a i tu ještě mnohý udiveně naslouchal, když místo dobře známých zvuků ouvertury ke 'Kouzelné flétně' slyšel rovněž veleznámé k 'Střelci'. Nám to bylo tenkrát, upřímně řečeno, velmi lhostejno, zda ta neb ona zpěvohra se dává; neboť obě jsou nám milé a drahé, když jen žádná nižšího stupně nezaujme místo klasického díla."

36 The National Theater in Prague has around 1,000 seats in its current configuration.

construction of the already planned representative building, which would offer all the appropriate conditions for the performance of even large operas:

Fenella – Miss Friedberk [sic],³⁷ the leading dancer of the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg. Our precious guest has been known to us since last year's guest performances at the German theatre as a dancer of the first class, who is able to combine comeliness of form with technical perfection [...]. Unfortunately, the width of our stage, which is not suitable even for large crowds, did not give her sufficient space to develop her art, since especially in scenes of violent passion she was in danger of bumping into a swimmer or a soldier, or even pushing him to the furthest edge of the stage. – It is a constant inducement to us not to forget that this is a temporary theater, and that we have every right to demand a second provincial theater. Our art demands that we should get a theater worthy of it. It is therefore to be wished that the adjective “provisional” should be gone for ever from theater playbills, so that every one attending the great operas should be mindful that they do not really belong here, but are performed only in miniature, until at long last a permanent great theater will reveal to us all the beauties and gems of the great operas in the manner in which the poet and composer intended them.³⁸

Unlike today, year-round performances of operas in Prague theaters, including July and August, were common at that time. Smetana also documents the fact

37 Katarina Friedberg [Ekaterina Fridberg] (1838–1901) was a Russian ballerina, by marriage Countess von Westphalen zu Fürstenberg. In 1864 she performed eight times at the Prozatímní divadlo.

38 Bedřich Smetana, [Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, *La muette de Portici*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 145 (May 31, 1864): 3, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 70: “Fenella – sl. Friedberková, první tanečnice císařského divadla v Petrohradě. Velectěný náš host znám jest nám již od loňských pohostinských her na německém divadle co tanečnice první třídy, která dovede spojit slíčnost tvarů s technickou dokonalostí [...]. Bohužel neposkytovala jí šířka našeho jeviště, nehodící se ani pro velké massy, dostatečného místa, aby umění své rozvinouti mohla, jelikož zvláště ve scénách prudké vášně přicházela do nebezpečení, že brzy vlevo, brzy vpravo vrazí do nějakého plavce neb vojáka aneb vytiskne jej dokonce až na nejzazší pokraj jeviště. – Jest nám to stálou pobudkou, abychom nezapomněli, že jest to prozatímním divadlem, a že plným právem domáhati se můžeme druhého zemského divadla. Umění naše toho žádá, abychom dostali divadlo jeho důstojné. Bylo by tedy k přání, aby na divadelních cedulích nescházel nikdy přídavek ‘prozatímní’, aby každý při velkých zpěvohrách pamětliv byl toho, že tyto vlastně sem nepatří, nýbrž předvádějí se jen en miniature, až konečně jednou definitivní velké divadlo odhalí nám všechny krásy a skvosty velké zpěvohry v způsobě, v jakém si ji básník a skladatel myslí.”

that during the summer months it was unbearable to perform operas at the Prozatímní divadlo:³⁹

It is really hard to decide who makes the greater sacrifice, the singers or the audience, if they are willing to endure the almost three-hour steam bath in 25–30 degrees Réaumur⁴⁰ in our cramped little theater [...]. It is a pity that the magical sounds of Tamino's flute did not also liberate us from the African temperature!⁴¹

These excerpts from individual reviews offer an overview of the topics that Smetana dealt with, the angles from which he judged individual opera performances, his precision, and his great knowledge of the opera repertoire, accomplished without the today's recordings. Not only is it evident that he had high expectations in terms of interpretation and dramaturgy, but it is also interesting to note Smetana's all-embracing perspective on the operation of the Prozatímní divadlo, focusing on the interconnection of all the indispensable components that are essential for the performance of operas.

4. Three Articles on Opera

In addition to reviews of individual opera performances, the *Národní listy* published three very valuable articles entitled "Public Musical Life in Prague. Opera," written by Smetana during June and July 1864 and published on June 24 and 15, and July 22, 1864.⁴² His own activity as a music critic probably

39 The summer stage of the Prozatímní divadlo, Arena Na Hradbách, for 1,200 spectators was opened in 1869. It was built by the Royal Provincial Czech Theater Company on a suggestion of its vice-president Antonín Čížek. This spacious wooden building ensured the expansion of the theater's operation by up to 160 performances in the summer months, when the air inside the Prozatímní divadlo was unbreathable. The New Town Theater for 3,000 spectators, which had functioned as an alternative summer venue since 1859, was rented by the management of the Prozatímní divadlo for opera performances between 1864 and 1876.

40 25–30 degrees on the Réaumur scale is equivalent to about 31–39 degrees Celsius or 87–102 degrees Fahrenheit.

41 Bedřich Smetana, [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*], *Národní listy* 4, no. 209 (August 3, 1864): 2–3, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 97–98: "Jest věru těžko rozhodnouti, kdo větší obět přináší, zdali zpěváci, či obecenstvo, odhodlá-li se přestáti téměř tříhodinnou parní lázeň při 25–30 stupních dle Reaumura v našem úzkém divadélku [...]. Škoda že kouzelné zvuky Taminovy flétny neosvobodily také nás od afrikanské teploty!"

42 The three essays on the opera are linked to the drafts held in the Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, Prague, in the Smetana Collection, S 217/1157. These are seven two-page texts for which Smetana used paper of letters he received (fragments of letters are part of the drafts), see Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 186–187. Four drafts in Czech translation, *ibid.*, 325–332.

prompted him to summarize the problems of the Czech theatrical operation at the Prozatímní divadlo, highlighting the weaknesses and outlining a course that the theater should adopt:

The purpose of these lines is to speak of the efforts of our national art in the field of music, and opera merits pride of place. So let our attention be focused first on Czech opera, as it is. After that let us be allowed to voice our modest opinion publicly and without fear about what it should be, that the demands of art, the wishes of all true and sincere artists and admirers of domestic art, that the needs and true utility of our nation be satisfied.⁴³

In the first article, Smetana wrote about the role of the national opera, bad translations, and the issue of traveling opera companies that he regarded as a path to stagnation, as they did not contribute to the cultivation of local art. In the second article he builds on these ideas and asks why there are no operas by Czech authors in the repertoire:

It is a well-known fact that there are already operas composed by local musicians and there are enough of them to fill the repertoire for several years. We have already heard fragments from individual operas in the concert hall; “The Leap of Horymír,”⁴⁴ to name one. Why does it not venture to leap from the Žofín Hall to the nearby Prozatímní divadlo?⁴⁵

Smetana pointed out that composers should not have to ask the theater to put on their opera as a favor, but rather the theater management should approach the artists and give them a real wage. He also considered it important to encourage

43 Bedřich Smetana, “Veřejný život hudební v Praze. I. Opera,” *Národní listy* 4, no. 169 (June 24, 1864): 1, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 77: “Úkolem těchto řádků jest, promluvit o snahách našeho národního umění na poli hudebním, a tím náleží opeře první místo. České opeře, jak jest, budíž naše pozornost nejprve věnována. Pak nám budíž dovoleno, abysme směli pronésti skromné svoje mínění veřejně a bez bázně o tom, jakou býti má [...], aby požadavkům umění, aby přáním všechných pravých a upřímných umělců a ctitelů umění domácího, aby potřebám a pravému užitku našeho národa učinila zadost.”

44 An allusion to excerpts from Maýr’s opera *Horymír*. Even the composer’s admirers did not speak highly of the opera’s music, which is why Maýr did not include it in the theater’s repertoire despite its attractive storyline.

45 Bedřich Smetana, “Veřejný život hudební v Praze. II. Opera,” *Národní listy* 4, no. 190 (July 15, 1864): 1, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 87: “Jeť vůbec známá věc, že jsou na světě operní skladby domácích hudebníků, že jest jich tolik, aby na několik let repertoire se jimi naplnil. Vždyť jsme slyšeli již zlomky z jednotlivých oper v síni koncertní; tak jmenovitě z ‘Horymírova skoku’. Proč neodváží se ke skoku ze sálu žofínského do blízkého zatímního divadla?”

the production of quality librettos. The performance of just two local operas was not enough, nor was a restricted repertoire that lacked composers from the Slavic nations. He also called for the performance of operas to be elevated to the level of drama so that Czech theater could be up to European standards. The fact that Smetana appealed for the inclusion of Czech works is not surprising, since during his year as a reviewer just two Czech operas were performed at the Prozatímní divadlo, and only on three occasions.⁴⁶ When he became the principal conductor in September 1866, the inclusion of original Czech operas was one of the great changes he initiated. His own operas, which had several reprises immediately after their first performance, contributed to this, of course.

The last essay devoted to the opera discusses the shortcomings that have already been mentioned, namely the lack of space offered by the Prozatímní divadlo: the small stage, which did not permit a large chorus, and the small orchestra pit, which could not accommodate more musicians than a chamber ensemble, and in which the wind instruments often drowned out the sound of the understaffed string section. For these and other reasons he urged that a decent and suitable national theater be built as soon as possible: “The devotees of the Prozatímní divadlo cry, ‘Thank God we have the Prozatímní divadlo,’ but we reply, ‘Yes, but let us ask God to deliver us out of it soon.’”⁴⁷

5. Conclusion

Smetana’s intensive year-long reporting in reviews of opera performances and the three extensive essays in the *Národní listy* provide a detailed picture of the level of theater culture at that time. The published texts reflect the complexity of Smetana’s personality and enable a deeper understanding of his conducting, performing, dramaturgical, and organizational skills. They offer a deeper insight into his artistic legacy and reveal him as a versatile personality who brought fresh ideas to all spheres of music in Prague in the second half of the nineteenth century and strove to bring them to fruition.

We can also better understand the connections between his theoretical reflections and his later work as principal conductor, when he tried to elevate opera to a high art and supplement the repertoire of the Prozatímní divadlo with original works by Czech and Slavic composers. Smetana strove not only for excellence in vocal performance, but also in the acting skills of the singers, emphasizing that the opera genre is musical drama, not just a showcase of

46 Zdeněk Skuherský, *Vladimír, bohův zvolenec* (twice), František Škroup, *Dráteník* (once).

47 Bedřich Smetana, “Veřejný život hudební v Praze. III. Opera,” *Národní listy* 4, no. 197 (July 22 1864): 1, in Jarka, *Kritické dílo Bedřicha Smetany*, 93: “Enthusiasté prozatímního divadla volají: ‘Děkujeme bohu, že máme prozatímní divadlo.’ My ale odpovídáme: ‘Ano, ale prosíme boha, aby nás brzy z něho vyprostil.’”

musical works. To what extent he succeeded in this endeavor is a topic for further research, but Smetana certainly encouraged those trends as principal conductor, and later as artistic director of the Czech Opera. However, every change is a process to which all parties must want to contribute, and this was not easy during Smetana's lifetime, nor is it today.

Translated from the Czech by Gerald Turner.

Smetana's Operas in his Correspondence

Especially valuable among Bedřich Smetana's writings on various topics related to opera are his reflections on his own operatic works—they are relatively rare and were mostly prompted by others. They reflect his attitude toward contemporary styles and singers, as well as his experience with the practical operation of the theater. An important aspect of Smetana's replies to letters from abroad are his assessments of himself, particularly when it concerned the possible staging of one of his operas. This fact explains why he tended to write more about the two operas performed abroad during his lifetime: *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) and *Dvě vdovy* (*The Two Widows*).

1. *Prodaná nevěsta*

What Smetana wrote about *Prodaná nevěsta* is especially interesting. He could rightly assume that foreigners had only a sketchy knowledge of him and his work, so he provided them with a brief and concise description of the opera. Smetana's first known evaluation of *Prodaná nevěsta* dates from 1869 and related to its possible performance in Paris. As at that time the work was still in the form of an *opéra comique* with spoken dialogue, so Smetana composed additional numbers, mainly ballet music. When he sent the full score and the piano-vocal score to the Parisian theater agent Adolphe Giacomelli, he included a description of the work that drew attention to its Czech national character that did not yet exist in European art music:

The melodies must still be new to Paris and arouse greater interest than usual because they are created entirely out of the world of the still little known, inexhaustible treasure trove of Czech folk tunes, which follow their own particular emotional path in terms of rhythm and melody.¹

Smetana was distinguishing himself as the creator of a new Czech national opera,

1 Smetana, letter to Adolphe Giacomelli, August 14, 1869, in Bedřich Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 2 (1863–1874), eds. Olga Mojžíšová, et al. (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press; Prague: Národní muzeum, 2020), 263: “Die Melodien dürften für Paris noch neu sein, und größeres Interesse erregen, als sonst, weil sie ganz und gar aus der in der Welt noch

drawing on Czech folklore, hitherto unknown to wider Europe. In keeping with the contemporary idea of musical originality achieved solely by being rooted in the “spirit of the nation” (“Volksg Geist”), he emphasized this quality of his music and the innovative nature of his achievement: “As far as my composition is concerned, it was my first attempt in this style, with the aim of imparting to it a certain Czechoslavic character, a little picture of the life of Czech country people.”²

Unfortunately, we have only partial knowledge of Smetana’s important letters to Felix Mottl from 1878, obtained from catalogues when they were subsequently auctioned abroad.³ At that time, Smetana had already composed seven operas, so he characterized *Prodaná nevěsta* as “a scene from folk life, more of an idyll”⁴ in the light of his various works that were systematically shaping a Czech national opera as the basis of a Czech national school, and he commented on the development of his individual style:

I wrote this kind of music in defiance, as it were, since several very influential men believed they had to accuse me that, as a Lisztian and Wagnerian, I am not at all capable of melodious and, nota bene, popular national music composed in the old-fashioned way. Since that time, when indeed this very opera is now considered the most popular national opera (and as the first, which practically ranks as the mother of all the others), I have of course striven for a much more unified style in my subsequent works—in which each act creates a coherent, uninterrupted whole and the other acts are also linked together by means of leitmotifs. So much merely to explain my musical point of view and the genesis of this first comic national opera.⁵

wenig bekannten unerschöpflichen Fundgrube der tschechischen Volksweise geschöpft, in Rhythmik und Melodik ihren eigenthümlichen Gefühlsweg gehen.”

- 2 Bedřich Smetana, letter to Eduard Nápravník, January 23, 1871, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 336: “Co se mé skladby týče, byl to můj první pokus v tomto slohu, s tou snahou, ji dát určitý ráz českoslovanský, malý obrazek podati ze života venkovského lidu českého.”
- 3 Felix Mottl was then conductor of the Ringtheater in Vienna and was interested in the possibility of performing Smetana’s operas *Tajemství* (*The Secret*) and *Prodaná nevěsta*.
- 4 Smetana, letter to Mottl, [December 27, 1878], in Bedřich Smetana, *Korespondence / Correspondence*, vol. 3 (1875–1879), eds. Olga Mojžíšová, et al. (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press; Prague: Národní muzeum, 2023), 469: “[...] eine Scene aus dem Volksleben, mehr eine Idylle [...]”
- 5 Ibid., 470: “Ich habe diese Art Musik gleichsam aus Trotz geschrieben, da man mir von Seite einiger vielvermögenden Herrn den Vorwurf machen zu müssen glaubte, dass ich als Lisztianer und Wagnerianer einer nach alter Art komponirten melodiosen und notabene national populären Musik gar nicht fähig bin. – Seit jener Zeit, wo eben diese Oper nun als die populärste Nationaloper, als erste, quasi die Mutter aller übrigen gilt, habe ich freilich in meinen folgenden Werken einen viel einheitlicheren Styl verfolgt, wo jeder Akt ein zusammenhängendes ununterbrochenes Ganze bildet, auch die übrigen Akte unter

Smetana's cumulative assessment of *Prodaná nevěsta* and the operas that followed it is a pertinent characterization of his operatic output as a whole. The composer deliberately took a stance against Wagnerianism while acknowledging what he had embraced from it.

Given the genre of *Prodaná nevěsta* as an *opéra comique* (as opposed to other operas characterized by a more "uniform style"), Smetana agreed to modifications of the work out of consideration for the performers and the traditions of the audience. He therefore accorded Eduard Nápravník, the conductor of *Prodaná nevěsta* in St. Petersburg, complete freedom in deciding on cuts:

In the future, if you consider that *Prodaná nevěsta* might continue to be performed, would you please either shorten the numbers inappropriate for the local audience, or omit them altogether. – It is of no great importance to me whether it is this or that number, and if Mařenka's aria in the third act is disagreeable, let it be omitted. Whereas I would have famously objected in my opera "Dalibor" to the shortening or even the omission of this or that part of the opera (there are no numbers in it), I am quite indifferent as regards "*Prodaná nevěsta*." The purpose of a comic opera is to entertain the audience. If it achieves this purpose, it is enough, even if its musical value was less. But if it has musical value, so much the better. But it is a matter of indifference to audiences.⁶

Smetana shared the notion of the time that for an opera to have a national character, it was important to choose material from Czech history or a Czech setting so as to use local color to characterize the Czech nation. Smetana stressed these parts of the opera for its performance:

[...] the ballet part is not a mere secondary matter and is divided into three national dances, which must be strictly executed, namely: a) Polka in act I including chorus, b) Furiant in act III [recte: II], and c) Skočná in act III, of which the last dance is more a scene or production of comedians.

einander mittelst der Leitmotive zusammenhängen. Soviel bloss zur Erläuterung meines musikalischen Standpunktes und der Entstehung dieser ersten komischen Nationaloper."

- 6 Smetana, letter to Nápravník, January 23, 1871, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 336: "Pro budoucnost, úznáte-li, že se může i nadále *Prodaná nevěsta* dávat, prosím by jste čísla tamnějšímu obecnstvu nepřiměřená a méně líbici buď skrátil, aneb i docela vynehal. – Nekládám velikou váhu na toto neb ono číslo, a jest-li arie Mařenčina v 3^{ím} jednání se nelíbí, ať se vyneha. Jako bych se ve sve zpěvochře 'Dalibor' slavně ohražil proti s krácení aneb dokonce vynechání toho neb onoho místa této opery (– čísla v ní žádné nejsou –); tak mně je to docela lhosteiny, co se týče '*Prodané nevěsty*'. Komická opera má ten účel: baviti obecnstvo. Dosáhne-li tento účel, dostačí to, třeba mněla menší hudební cenu. Má-li ale k tomu ještě cenu hudební, tím lépe pro ní. Obecnstvu je to ale lhostejny."

At the same time, the solo singers should give their best to the different clowns' pieces, as it was presented in [St.] Petersburg [...].⁷

According to Smetana, the deliberate “Czechness” of the music was an assurance that it would arouse interest in foreign countries thanks to its novelty and originality: “All the operas cited here are established as repertoire operas⁸ in Prague and would certainly also be accessible to a foreign audience thanks to their original melodies in a truly national style.”⁹ After his experience with the unfavorable reception of *Prodaná nevěsta* in St. Petersburg, however, Smetana conceded that its national character could have been the reason for the Russian critics' failure to understand and indeed to reject the work: “If the Russian critics do not like *Prodaná nevěsta*, I will not take it too much to heart; it was never intended for the world outside, and so it must also be foreign to foreign audiences.”¹⁰

Smetana took a completely different view of the prospect of performing *Prodaná nevěsta* and *Tajemství* (*The Secret*)—and possibly other operas of his—in the multinational capital of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. He realistically estimated that, in addition to the artistic enrichment of the operatic repertoire in Vienna, it could also be of material benefit to the theater management:

It was always worth the effort to attempt to present one of their national operas, even if in German translation, to Vienna's large Slavic population—as they say, over 100,000 souls of a purely Czech-Slavic nation. Because of their novelty, these operas should fill many houses.¹¹

7 Smetana, letter to Mottl, [December 27, 1878], in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 469–470: “[...] der Ballet-theil keine bloss Nebensache ist, und sich in drei Nationaltänze theilt, welche strikte ausgeführt werden müssen, nämlich: a) Polka im I Akt sammt Chor, b) Furiant im III [recte: II] Akt, und c) Skocna im III Akt, welcher letzter Tanz mehr eine Komödianten-Scene oder Production ist, wobei die Solo-Sänger verschiedene Clownstücke zum Besten geben können, wie es in Petersburg gegeben wurde [...]”

8 A reference to the operas *Prodaná nevěsta*, *Dvě vdovy* and *Hubička*.

9 Smetana, letter to Mottl, [December 23, 1878], in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 461: “Alle diese hier angeführten Opern sind in Prag stehende Repertoire-Opern, und würden eben wegen ihrer originellen Melodien in echter Nationalweise auch einem fremden Publicum gewiss zugänglich sein.”

10 Smetana, letter to Nápravník, January 23, 1871, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 336: “Nelíbí-li se ‘Prodaná nevěsta’ ruské kritice, nebudu si to moc brát k srdci, nebila nikdy určená pro svět zahraničný, a tak musí být pro cize obecnstvo též cizou.”

11 Smetana, letter to Mottl, [December 23, 1878], in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 460: “Es lohnte sich immer der Mühe, einen Versuch zu machen, der grossen Zahl slavischer Bewohner Wiens—wie man sagt, über 100,000 Seelen blos cecho-slavischer Nation, eine ihrer Nationalopern, wenn auch in deutscher Übersetzung, vorzuführen. Der Neuheit wegen müssten diese Opern viele volle Häuser machen.”

Smetana was well aware that to attract foreign interest in *Prodaná nevěsta* and his other operas, it was necessary to emphasize their success at home: "It is the most popular, beloved opera here in Prague and has already received over 70 performances."¹²

In Smetana's accounts of *Prodaná nevěsta*, a range of issues concerning his entire operatic output are concentrated as a focal point. Let's take a closer look at what Smetana's correspondence in its entirety says about them.

2. National Character

As discussed above, Smetana shared contemporary notions about the conditions and sources required to achieve a Czech national character in opera. He was explicit about this when he rejected the libretto of *Ahasver* offered by Josef Václav Frič:

At the present moment, when, especially in the tragic style, I have not yet been able to show the audience the degree of Czechoslavic dramatic music, in the way I have created it in my mind, as Libuše, in which that approach already prevails, has not yet been performed, a libretto like *Ahasver* would be too cosmopolitan for me, so that the choruses of Jews or Romans could not be performed in any Czechoslavic manner. And this would soon divert me, at a time when, as I say, our local style has not yet stabilized, from the course that I have initiated, and which I intend to pursue to the end. That is why I have to give preference to librettos from Czech history over cosmopolitan ones; although in due course I will tackle them.¹³

However, the choice of material from Czech history or a Czech milieu as a means of achieving an opera's national character may have been an obstacle to his work's reception abroad. Smetana recognized this problem with *Prodaná nevěsta* in St. Petersburg, and conversely, he recognized it regarding Russian operas in

12 Ibid.: "Sie ist hier in Prag die populärste beliebteste Oper, und erlebte bereits über 70 Aufführungen."

13 Smetana, letter to Karel Frič, February 10, 1879, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 491: "V nynějším okamžiku, kde vzlášť v tragickým slohu jsem obecnstvu ještě ten stupeň československé dramatické hudby, tak jak jsem si ho v duchu vytvořil, nemohl okázat, – jelikož Libuše, kde onen směr již panuje, dosud nebyla provozovaná, bylo by mně libretto, jako jest *Ahasver*, příliš kosmopolitické, tak že by sbory židů, aneb římanů, v žádném československým směru se provésti nemohli[.] A to mně, kde jak pravím, sloh náš domácí, dosud není ustálý, by drobet brzo vyrušilo z onoho směru, kterému jsem dál podnět, a který chci až do konce provézt. Proto musím po dnes dáti librettům z historie české přednost před kosmopolitickými; ač to někdy časem svým take k těmto dojde."

Prague (mainly because of their librettos), as illustrated by his assessment of the prospects of Nápravník's first opera, *Nizhegorodtsi* (*The Nizhni-Novgorodians*):

After looking through your opera "Nizhegorodtsi" I found that your fears about your music are quite unfounded. What can be judged from the piano-vocal score without the words—forgive me, for I am obliged to say it in the true sense of the word, indeed without the words or without the text as far as I am concerned—because I cannot read a word of Russian writing, and I am hardly going to learn it now—I have to say that your music has impressed me most favorably, for a noble tone prevails throughout, and the work itself is pure, clear, and full of life. – In short, I have had your opera transcribed from the piano-vocal score to solo parts. I guarantee that the music will be liked; but whether the substance of the opera will be also, I do not know, for the plot is absolutely unknown to me. We here do not like the plot of "Life for the Tsar," i.e., as it is alien to us after all, although no one would deny the music is a work of genius.¹⁴

Let us recall that as an opera composer, Smetana thought using a foreign theme would bring success abroad. He admitted that this was one of the reasons why he decided to compose an opera based on Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night*: "[...] I wanted to compose Viola for that reason alone, because I hoped to reach beyond the Czech borders with it."¹⁵

Smetana's reasons for rejecting the libretto of *Ahasver* show how he wished to shape the national character of the opera significantly through *couleur locale*. He praised himself when he succeeded in composing numbers that were the primary vehicles of *couleur locale*, as in the second version of *Dvě vdovy*:

14 Smetana, letter to Nápravník, June 10, 1874, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 543: "Po přehlednutí Vaší zpěvohry 'Nižegorodci' zhlednul jsem, že Vaše obavy stran hudby Vaší jsou docela nemístná. Co se dá soudit s klavírního výtahu a bez slov, odpusťte, že to v pravém smyslu slova musím říci, ano bez slov neb bez textu pro mně, proto že ani slovíčko rušského písma neumím přečíst, a sotva se už naučím, tak musím přiznat, že hudba Vaše samma v sobě na mně udělala dojem ten nejpříznivější, anť všude vládne jakýs úšlechtilý ton, a práce samma v sobě je čistá, přehledná, duchaplná. – Skrátka dál jsem již Vaší operu s klavírního výtahu do hlasu zpěvných rozepisovat. Že se hudba bude líbit, za to ručím; jest-li ale take látka opery, to nevím, anť mi děj naprosto neznámý jest. Děj k 'Životu za Cára' ku příkladu se nám zde take nelíbí, ačkoliv hudbě neupře níkdo genialnost, \ač/ jen pro nás předce cizou." Glinka's opera *Zhizn za tsarya* (*A Life for the Tsar*) did not receive its anticipated approval in Prague and was withdrawn from the repertoire of the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater) after six performances (August 29, 1866–August 3, 1867).

15 Smetana, letter to Eliška Krásnohorská, January 31, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 362: "[...] já sám jen proto Violu jsem chtěl komponovat, proto že jsem doufal s tím i za hranice české se dostat."

I must joyfully confess to you that I have written a national song for the tenor, (the part of Ladislav,) for the opera “Dvě vdovy,” which they are completely reworking with recitatives and new numbers and additions, which, if not better than the “lullaby from Hubička” is at least an absolute pendant to that song.¹⁶ – It strikes me as really successful. I think the “Dvě vdovy” will be playing to full houses in the autumn in their new attire, just like “Hubička,” and so far it is without royalties.¹⁷

Hopefully I have succeeded!?! – At least I have kept Ladislav’s song from the beginning of the second act (behind the scenes) almost as a pendant to the “lullaby from Hubička” The song is in the national style, and I personally can claim that it is a “new national song.” [...] The first-act finale in the ensemble of all characters, including Karolina, Anežka, Ladislav and Mumlal, as well as the tercetto in the second act between Toník[,] Lidunka and Mumlal, also maintain the national style.¹⁸

3. Gaining Recognition Abroad

Smetana had varying attitudes regarding the possibility of establishing himself as an opera composer abroad. Initially, even before his first opera *Braniboři v Čechách* (*The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*) was produced, he counted on it:

At the moment I am working on an opera: Dalibor, whose text is truly one of the most successful and gratifying for the composer. [...] As the text already exists in German and Czech, it will also be possible to present

- 16 In the adaptation of *Dvě vdovy* from 1877, the characters of the peasant boy Toník and his bride Lidunka were added, the spoken dialogue was replaced by recitatives, and new musical numbers were added. Píseň Ladislava in act 2, scene 1: “Když zavítá máj”; Vendulka’s Lullaby from the opera *Hubička*, act 1, scene 7: “Hajej, můj andílku” and “Letěla bělouňka holubička”.
- 17 Smetana, letter to [Ferdinand Dattel], June 7, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 284: “Musím se Vám radostně přiznat, že jsem ku zpěvohře ‘Dvě vdovy’, – kterou úplně přepracuji s recitativama a s novými čísli a dodátky – napsal pro tenor, (partii Ladislava,) národní píseň, která, když ne skorem lepší než ‘ukolebavka z Hubičky’ tak alespoň úplný pendant této písní jest. – Mně se zdá velmi zdařila, myslím, že ‘Dvě vdovy’ na podzim v tom novým rouchu budou dělat domy, jako ‘Hubička’ a k tomu ještě bez tantiém.”
- 18 Smetana, letter to Emanuel Züngel, July 16, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 299–300: “Snad se mně to podařilo!? – Alespoň držím píseň Ladislava z počátku druhého jednání (za scénou) takorba za pendant ‘ukolebavky z Hubičky’[.] Píseň je úplně v národním slohu držaná, a sám mohu tvrdit, že jest to ‘nová národní píseň’. [...] Finale prvního aktu v ensembu všech osob i Karoliny, Anežky, Ladislava a Mumlala, jako Tercetto v druhém mezi Toníkem[,] Lidunkou a Mumlalem jsou též v národním slohu držané.”

the opera outside Bohemia's borders, an effort which we will make from all sides.¹⁹

As mentioned above, at one time he intended to make a name abroad with an opera on a world-famous theme, but by the late 1870s he had abandoned the idea:

I have now given up this aspiration; I don't care if my compositions are performed or made known abroad. I am growing old, and in view of the certainty that my hearing will never return, I am no longer tempted to extend my fame, I do not strive for a greater reputation, I am quite satisfied with what I have at home.²⁰

Later, however, he changed his mind again. Encouraged by a successful performance of his Piano Trio in G Minor, op. 15, in Hamburg in April 1880, which had been initiated by his friend and promoter Ludevít Procházka, Smetana expressed a wish to offer *Dvě vdovy* for performance at the Hamburg Stadttheater (Municipal Theater):

The undeniable success of a repeat performance of "Dvě vdovy" a few days ago set me to thinking whether this opera might not be the most suitable for a performance on a foreign—namely German—stage? – All my other friends and admirers share my opinion. – In its recent reworking this opera has both a national and a cosmopolitan character, and the latter, has a certain salon feel, as you know. Two ladies and two gentlemen with excellent vocal and acting skills are bound to carry this opera to a great victory.

I have therefore taken the liberty to inquire if your dear lady might be willing to perform my opera on the Hamburg stage in the role of one of these widows? – A good translation, in German, would be taken care of, and the score would be copied and sent as soon as possible at my expense. I myself would ask nothing for the first performance, except, if it were a success, for the following reprise.

I would ask that it be ascertained, no matter what, whether it is possible

19 Smetana, letter to Isaac Philip Valentin, April 20, 1865, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 77–78: "Gegenwärtig arbeite ich an einer Oper: Dalibor deren Text wahrhaftig ein äußerst gelungener und für den Komponisten dankbarer ist. [...] Da der Text bereits deutsch und čechisch vorliegt, so wird die Oper auch außen Böhmens Grenzen gegeben werden können, was unsere allseitige Bemühung sein wird."

20 Smetana, letter to Krásnohorská, January 31, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 362: "Teď nemám více této žádosti, je mi lhostejno, provozují-li se anebo seznámí-li se v cizině moje skladby. Já již stárnu, a jistota úplná, že se nikdy více můj sluch nenavráti, mne neláka více na rozšíření mé slávy, nebáším po větším, jsem uplně spokojen s tou domácí."

or not. I thought that, supposing it was liked, I might obtain a publisher for it, and perhaps forge a way onto stages in other countries for my other operas, in spite of their purely Czech character. It's futile to approach theater directors directly, they won't take any notice. But if a renowned artist, such as your gracious wife, had a desire to appear in a role herself, it would be quite a different matter.

Believe me, that only my illness forces me, out of my innate self-denial, to step out, offer myself, and become persistent. I would like to secure my old age at last by at least a modest income, which would protect me from worry and want. So please tender my apologies to your dearest lady for submitting my request to her, and at the same time beg her not to reject it out of hand, if possible.²¹

4. Publication and Popularization of the Operas

In his efforts to disseminate his operatic music at home and especially abroad, Smetana was acutely aware what a drawback it was that Prague music publishers had limited means of financing the publication of piano-vocal scores of operas. By 1880 he had only published a piano-vocal score of *Prodaná nevěsta* with Czech and German texts, which, moreover, in his opinion, “admittedly turns out to be rather inadequate and would have to be improved here and there if it were

- 21 Smetana, letter to Ludevít Procházka, April 19, 1880, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/296: “Dvě vdovi’ které se před několiká dní zase opakovaly, a sice rozhodným úspěchem, mě dáli myšlenku, jest-li by tato opera nebyla nejvhodnější k uvedení na cizím a sice německým jevišti? – Mého náhledu jsou i všickni ostatní moje známi a příznivci. – V novém přepracování má opera tato obojí ráz, národní a kosmopolitický, a tento docela, jak Vám známo, v jakemsi salonním tonu. Dvě dámy a dvě pání, když jsou výteční v zpěvu a ve hře, musejí tuto operu vésti k velkému vítězství. Protož jsem si vzal tu smělost, poptati se, jest-li by Vaše nejmilejší panní nechtěla v uloze jedné těchto vdov operu mou uvéstí na jevišti Hamburském? – O překlad dobrý, německy, bylo by postaráno, a partitura by se co nejrychleji na moje útraty opsala a zaslala. Já sám bych pro první představení nežádal nic, až, jest-li by měla úspěch, za následující opakování. Prosím, aby se bez všeho ohledu o tom určilo, je-li to možná, neb ne. Myslím, že, dejme tomu, že by se líbila, bych si pro ni také získal nakladatele, a snad prorazil, i ostatním mým operám, vzdor jejich ryze českému směru cestu na zahraničný jeviště!? Direktně se obrátit na divadelní ředitelstva je marná práce, ani si toho nevšimnou. Ale když věhlasná umělkyně, jako jest jemnostpaní, samá si přeje vystoupit v uloze nějaké, tak je to hned docela jiná věc. Věřte mně, že jen moje choroba mně nutí, z mého mně vrozeného sebezapření vystoupiti, a se nabýzet, a stát se dotíravým. Rád bych konečně si moje stáří ubezpečil alespoň poněkud skromnými jistými příjmy, které by mně chránili před starostmi a nouzí. Protož mně omluvte u Vaší nejmilejší paní, že jí prosbu svou předkládám, zároveň prose, aby se beze všech okolku zamítlo, když by to nemohlo být.”

to come to a performance in Germany.”²² Smetana rightly complained about the inadequate production of piano-vocal scores:

Unfortunately, we have to limit ourselves to individual short songs from our operas; there is no publisher to be found for a complete piano-vocal score of an opera. And on top of that, the composer has to give it away for free. Perhaps it would be possible, at least with the most popular operas, if there were enough subscribers or subscribers for the work at the outset, so that the publisher would know beforehand that at least the expense would be worthwhile. – This requires agitation throughout the Czech music-loving public, and that’s a hard thing to do!²³

We composers suffer most of all from the fact that our compositions are not printed. Find some gentlemen here and there around the country and have them call to Prague to the music publishers for piano-vocal scores of operas already performed, and all will be satisfied and assisted. [...] As long as there is no demand for piano-vocal scores of operas, no publisher will want to print an opera. Believe me, all Czech composers would be indebted to the first person who pressed for our compositions to be printed, and available to the whole world.²⁴

With a view to popularizing the music of his operas, Smetana also welcomed the publication of individual vocal and piano medleys: “The medley from ‘Hubička’ arranged by J. Löw will meet similar requirements; it is not hard to play and yet it

22 Smetana, letter to Mottl, [December 23, 1878], in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 460: “[...] freilich ziemlich mangelhaft ausfiel, und hie und da verbessert werden müsste, wenn es zur deutschen Aufführung kommen sollte.” A piano-vocal score of *Prodaná nevěsta* (without recitatives) was published in Prague in 1872 by the Maticе hudební with Czech and German text (translated by Emanuel Züngel).

23 Smetana, letter to Rudolf Thurn-Taxis, December 25, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 466: “Bohužel musíme se obmezit pouze na jednotlivé krátké písně z našich oper, na celý výtah z opery nenajde se žádného nakladatele. A to vše aby dal skladatel zdarma. Snad by to šlo, alespoň s nejvíce oblíbenými zpěvohry, kdyby se našlo subscribentů neb abonentů na to dílo napřed tolik, aby nakladatel již napřed věděl, že se mu alespoň náklad vyplatí. – K tomu je zapotřeby agitaci po celým českým hudby milovným obecnstvem, a to je těžká věc!”

24 Smetana, letter to Antonín Navrátil, December 19, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 457–458: “Mý skladatelove trpíme nejvíce tím, že naše skladby se neuveřejňují tiskem. Hleďte Panove sebrat několik hlasů z krajín sem a tam, které volají do Prahy na nakladatele hudební o klavírní výtahy již provozovaných oper, a všem bude zadost učiněno, a pomuženo. [...] Dokud není žádná poptávka o klavírní výtahy oper, nechce žádný nakladatel tisknout operu. Věřte mně, že nám všem skladatelům českým by se ten zavděčil, který by první na to tlačil, aby naše skladby vyšli tiskem a tak do celého světa.”

is complete; the arrangement of the melodic parts from the opera is also skillful, apart from a few little mistakes [...].”²⁵

But when his Prague publisher František Augustin Urbánek wanted to promote the premiere of the new opera by publishing a potpourri, following the example of foreign publishers, Smetana did not agree:

But as for the similar treatment from the new opera, “Čertova stěna” [“The Devil’s Wall”], there are major obstacles. Until it has been performed, who can conscientiously judge the beauty of this or that passage with certainty just by reading the score? An opera is a manuscript. Who would buy the whole opera for printing if it had already been published, if only as a medley without words? It is different after the first three performances, when the audience and the critic praise this or that passage. It provides a clue for the choice of such a piano medley. [...] One more thing: the audience before the performance will have little idea of the value of the music in the “Čertova stěna”, for such potpourris only serve to remind the audience of the performance; but afterwards they are welcomed by the audience because of the lightness of the style, etc. That’s why I am in favor of arranging a medley like this after the performance, and I think you will gain more by doing so.”²⁶

5. Success with the Public

Of course, success with the public mattered to Smetana. In the nineteenth century, approval manifested itself in the audience calling for an encore of certain parts of the opera. Smetana declared of this habit:

25 Bedřich Smetana, *Hubička. Prostonárodní opera. Směs pro piano na 2 ruce v lehkém slohu* by Josef Löw was published by František Augustin Urbánek in Prague in July 1882. Smetana, letter to František Augustin Urbánek, August 10, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/494: “Směs z ‘Hubičky’ upraven J. Löwem vyhoví úplně požadavkům podobným, hra není těžká a přece plná; zastavení melodyckých míst z opery jsou též obratné, až na několik chybiček [...]”

26 Smetana, letter to František Augustin Urbánek, October 8, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/494: “Co se týče ale podobné zpracování z nové opery: ‘Čertova stěna’, tak jsou při tom velké překážky. Dokud nebyla provozovaná, kdo může svědomitě pouze čtením partitury s jistotou o kráse toho aneb onoho místa svědomitě rozsoudit? Opera je manuscript. Kdo by koupil operu celou k tisku, kdyby již byla vyšla třeba jen co směs beze slov? Něco jiného po prvních třech představení, kde obecenstvo a kritika místa ta neb ona vyznamenají. Tu je vodítko na volbu pro takový směs na klavír. [...] Ještě něco: obecenstvo před představením nebude ani dost malý pojem mít o ceně hudby v ‘Čertově stěně’ neb takové potpourris oúčinkují pouze co reminiscence z divadla; potom ale jsou obecenstvu vítané pro lechost slohu a.t.d. Proto mám za to, aby se směs podobný aranžoval až po představení, a myslím, že získáte tím víc.”

As for encores of numbers in my operas, it is not for me to decide. I'm against repetition in principle. – But I know from experience that, with the best will in the world, you can't do anything if the audience are insistent and won't give way. It can't be helped, the audience is the master of the house, and if they ask for an encore, it has to happen. It is true that I personally would rather that my compositions should not become worn out and stale by too much repetition of numbers. Therefore, I can leave it entirely up to you how and what you repeat.²⁷

At the same time, he was happy to use such an accolade from the audience as a recommendation. As proof of the popularity of *Prodaná nevěsta*, he had already sent to Paris a list of numbers that were regularly repeated in Prague:

As far as the value of this comic opera, I of course cannot make a judgment as the author; I will state only this much as *factum*: that it has become the towering repertoire opera in Prague, which always has a full house; that nos. 1 and 3 of act 1, the duets nos. 3 and 4 of act 2, and the sextet of act 3 have to be reprised every time, not counting the applause for the choruses and the ballet.²⁸

Prince Rudolf Thurn-Taxis once asked him to suggest songs suitable for a women's choir and for his wife, who directed the choir and sang in public: "But she also lacks Czech solo songs or arias, so she asks you to kindly advise her on such."²⁹ Smetana recommended some and wrote about the reaction of the Prague audience:

27 Smetana, letter to Adolf Čech, February 17, 1879, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 501: "Co se týče opakování čísel v mých operách, tak já sám nemohu nic rozhodnout. V principu jsem proti opakování. – Ale ze zkušenosti vím, že při nejlepší vůli člověk nic nevířídí, když obecenstvo na svém stojí, a nepovolí. – Obecenstvo, už to jinak není, je pánem v domě, a když žádá opakování, musí se to stát. Že bych sám si přál, aby se moje skladby přílišným opakováním čísel brzo nezpotřebovaly, a nezvšednily, je pravda. Protož Vám to mohu úplně přenechat, jak a co opakujete."

28 Smetana, letter to [Adolphe Giacomelli], ante August 14, 1869, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 263: "Was den Werth dieser komischen Oper anbelangt, kann ich als Autor natürlich nicht beurtheilen; nur so viel als factum will ich angeben, daß sie \die Oper/ stehende Repertoiropen in Prag geworden, welche immer ihr volles Haus hat; daß die No 1, 3, des 1 Aktes, die Duetten N. 3, 4 des 2 Aktes, das Sextett des 3 Aktes jedesmal wiederholt werden müssen, ungerechnet des Beifalls bei den Chören und dem Ballet." He refers to the following items from *Prodaná nevěsta*: act 1, scene 1, chorus: "Proč bychom se netěšili"; act 1, scene 2, duet (Mařenka, Jeník): "Věrné milování"; act 2, scene 3, duet (Mařenka, Vašek): "Známť já jednu dívčinu!"; act 2, scene 4, duet (Jeník, Kecal): "Znám jednu dívku"; act 3, scene 5, sextet: "Rozmysli si, Mařenko".

29 Thurn-Taxis, letter to Smetana, December 21, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 459: "Nedostává se jí ale také českých solových písní neb arií, prosí tedy, abyste jí i takové laskavě poradil."

I made so bold as to give the Princess the short song, “The Lullaby” from Hubička, which was such a success on the stage that Vendulka, even though she fell asleep at the end of the song, always had to wake up to sing it again at the request of the audience. As soon as I can find someone who can quickly arrange the piano accompaniment, I shall immediately have a copy made of the duet for the two ladies from the opera “Dvě vdovy,” which is also always encored.³⁰

In the case of *Libuše*, however, Smetana wanted the conductor to warn the singers in advance that they should not aim at the usual expressions of favor from the audience:

[...] The opera differs from those hitherto accustomed to the Bohemian stage, and therefore requires more dedication on the part of the performers and more patience on your part. Therefore, my friend, I beg you, at the very first piano rehearsals, to briefly spell out on my behalf to all the honorable ladies and gentlemen the nature and style of my opera, that the singer must renounce almost all merely operatic mannerisms, such as: singing in front of the footlights to the audience, thinking about abstaining from *Abgänge*, *Koronen* [exits, fermatas], applause after a phrase, or towards the end of a performance between scenes, curtain calls between scenes, etc. almost denying themselves. Although there are enough melodic and lyrical moments for everyone in this opera, everyone must be a dramatic artist rather than a concert singer.³¹

30 Smetana, letter to Thurn-Taxis, January 3, 1879, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 477: “Vzal jsem si tu smělost, podati paní kněžně krátkou onu píseň: ‘Ukolebávku’ z Hubičky, která se těšila na jevišti takového úspěchu, že Vendulka, ačkoliv při zpěvu na konci usné, vždy se probudit musela, aby ji na žádost obecnstva z novu zazpívala. Jak mile najdu, kdo by v rychlosti klavírní doprovazení zařídil, nechám ihned z opery ‘Dvě vdovy’ duetto pro oné dvě dámy, které též se vždy opakuje, opsat.” – act 2, scene 2, duet of Karolina and Anežka: “Není pochybností více [...] Rozhodnuto, uzavřeno”.

31 Smetana, letter to Čech, January 2, 1881, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/211: “[...] opera [se] liší od dosud zvyklých na jeviště českém, a tedy větší obětavostí ze strany pánů oučinkujících a trpělivostí z Vaší strany vyžaduje. Protož Vás, příteli, prosím, by jste hned při prvních skouškách klavírních všem ctěným dámám a pánům ve jménu mým ráz a styl mé opery v kratkosti a v tom smyslu vyložil, že zpěvák se musí takorů všech pouze operistických manýrů, jako jsou: zpívat před lampami tam na obecnstvo, myslet na: *Abgänge*, *Koronen*, Applaus po větě aneb ku konci výstupu mezi scénou, vyvolání mezi scénou a.t.d – odřict, takorů sebe zapřít. Ačkoliv je v té opeře melodyckých a lýrických momentu pro každého dost, tak přece musí každý býti vic dramatickým umělcem než koncertantním zpěvákem.”

6. The Importance of Public Performance of Music

As an opera composer and conductor, Smetana knew from his own experience that the quality of a work is most reliably demonstrated by a live performance:

Above all, I must definitely reject the notion that by merely reading the score anyone could dare to pronounce his verdict on a piece of music as either good or bad, except for the work of some unskilled beginner or non-skilled player. More than any other composition (piano or orchestral, etc.), every opera work depends on foreign performers—singers, who sometimes turn a minor composition into a striking event, applause, a definite success, whereas many times they spoil a solid composition to the point of failure. The judge pronounces his verdict that the work is of no great account, as also happened in the case of my “*Braniboři*”³² and lo and behold, when performed, the work is definitely liked, and is a great success, as indeed happened in the case of the “*Brandenburgers*,” although the judges were such gentlemen as Ambros, Krejčí, Goldschmidt,³³ etc. – When I myself watched the latest operetta: “*The Young Duke*” by Lecoq,³⁴ I did not see a single number worthy of note, and I would say, if my opinion were sought, that the entire operetta has almost no value. And the fact is that this operetta fills houses, and several of the numbers must always be encored. – One can never gauge the result from a mere reading of operatic compositions.³⁵

32 In 1863 Smetana entered *Braniboři v Čechách* in a competition held by Count Jan Nepomuk Harrach for the best Czech historical and comic opera.

33 August Wilhelm Ambros, Josef Krejčí, Sigmund Goldschmidt.

34 Charles (Alexandre) Lecocq, *Le Petit Duc*. The opera was first performed in Czech under the title *Malý vévoda* (*The Little Duke*) on November 23, 1878. Its success is evidenced by a total of forty-two performances during the lifetime of the Prozatímní divadlo.

35 Smetana, letter to Antonín Navrátil, December 19, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 456–457: “Především musím rozhodně zamítnouti ten náhled, že by pouhým čtením partitury kdokoliv mohl určitě se opovážit, výřknouti svůj ortel nad nějakou skladbou, že jest buď dobrá neb špatná, vyjímaje dílo nějakého neshopného začátečníka aneb nedouka. Každé operní dílo jest více než která koliv jiná komposice (klavírní neb orchestrální a. t. d.) poukázaná na cizý interprety – zpěváky, kteří kolikráte z nepatrné komposice utvořejí pozoruhodný výjev, applaus, úspěch rozhodný, kde naopak kolikráte důkladnou komposici zkazejí až k propadnutí. Soudce vyřkne svůj ortel, že dílo za moc nestojí, jak se to stalo též při mých ‘*Braniborech*’, a ejhle, dílo se potom při provozování rozhodně líbí, a má veliký úspěch, jak se to skutečně při ‘*Braniborech*’ stalo, ačkoliv soudcové byli pání jako: Ambros, Krejčí[,] Goldschmidt. a. t. d. – Já sám když jsem prohlížel nejnovější operettu: ‘*Mladý vejvoda*’ od Lecoq’a, nevyděl jsem ani jediné číslo, které by zasluhovalo povšimnutí, a řekl bych, kdyby se toto teprv dávalo na moje votum, že celá operetta nemá takorůžka žádná ceny. A v skutečnosti tato operetta plní domy, a několik čísel se musí vždy opakovat. – Z pouhého čtení skladeb operních se nedá níkdý soudit na výsledek.”

At the time of the short engagement of the Polish tenor Mieczysław Kamiński at the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional Theater) in Prague, Smetana hoped:

Since Mr. Kaminský has the stature, the acting ability and a good sustained voice, Dalibor should finally make the breakthrough I would like to see in view of the thoroughness and authenticity of this work. Perhaps this opera will at last achieve recognition!³⁶

This single sentence suggests a different reason for *Dalibor*'s failure than the usual unfavorable criticism and controversy about Smetana's alleged Wagnerianism. Smetana, as the principal conductor and subsequently head of the Czech opera company, had difficulty in finding a suitable first tenor, and this was evident in the case of the title role of *Dalibor*. There was a shortage of performers capable of arousing livelier interest in the work, which was unusually demanding for the audience, something of which Smetana was aware.

7. The Composer and the Singers

Smetana composed some operatic roles with a particular performer in mind, for example, Kalina in *Tajemství* for Josef Lev: "In the new opera on which I am working diligently, insofar as the humming and vertigo that have often plagued me of late allow me, you will play the leading role."³⁷ When the director of the Prozatímní divadlo, Rudolf Wirsing, failed to respect Smetana's wishes at the premiere of *Hubička* and gave the role of Martinka to Marie Cachová, Smetana responded, "I would also have liked Mrs. Fibichová to sing the alto part, because when I was composing, I had her and her voice in mind."³⁸

Smetana respected good and proven singers, giving them ample opportunity to present themselves in his operas. Therefore, when composing *Tajemství*, he made this request to the librettist Eliška Krásnohorská:

36 Smetana, letter to Čech, October 20, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 324: "Když postava, hra a dobrý vytrvalý hlas jsou atributy páně Kaminského, tak by arcit Dalibor konečně tak prorazil, jak bych si to přál vshledem svědomitostí a pravdě této práce. Snad přijde přece pro tuto operu čas poznání!" The Polish tenor Mieczysław Kamiński made a guest appearance at the Prozatímní divadlo in September 1877 and was briefly a member of the opera company from October 1, 1877 to April 1, 1878. There was no performance of *Dalibor* during his engagement.

37 Smetana, letter to Josef Lev, January 4, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 353: "V nové zpěvohře, na které pilně pracují, dokud mně hučení a závrať, která mně v nejnovější době často trápi, dovolují, budete mýt hlavní úlohu."

38 Smetana, letter to Čech, February 19, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 270: "Těž bych si přál, aby paní Fibichová zpívala tu altpartii; neb při komponování tanula ona mě na myslí, a její hlas."

I would like to have a separate number for Bonifác out of consideration for the singer, because it must be sung by someone of first rank, such as young Čech, and he always wants to have at least one number where he can stand out from the rest.³⁹ It would be best in the last act, and if that is not possible, I would at least let him sing that song with Skřivánek on top of the stove as a duet.⁴⁰ Otherwise, he has no separate number in the whole opera, and he would consider the role episodic and perhaps might not want to take it. I speak from experience!⁴¹

Betty Fibichová, who played the spinster Roza in *Tajemství*, chose this opera for her benefit concert and Smetana thanked her for it:

The musical score on paper is dead; it only comes to life through the work of accomplished performers. You, dear lady, are such a performer par excellence, and by choosing one of my compositions for your evening of honor, you have done it and me great honor, and me especially great joy. I wish you every success with all my heart!⁴²

On a visiting card, Smetana expressed his gratitude to Josef Lev, who sang Kalina in the same opera, and sent him some game, probably two partridges: “Mr. J. Lev || *Bedřich Smetana*. || begs you to accept these 2 adorable birds, and wishes you bon appetit.”⁴³

39 Karel Čech sang Bonifác at the premiere on September 18, 1878, at the New Czech Theater in Prague. Krásnohorská wrote for him the text of the aria inserted into the act 2, scene 7: “Jsem voják, stál jsem v bitvách proti Prusu.”

40 Smetana orchestrated the aria in act 2, scene 3, “Aj, k čemu, bratře, strachy máš” as a duet for Skřivánek and Bonifác with chorus.

41 Smetana, letter to Eliška Krásnohorská, January 31, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 363: “Rád bych mněl nějaké číslo samostatné pro Bonifáce, a to jenom z ohledu na pěvce, že ho musí zpívat první síla, k. p. mladý Čech, a takový dycky chce mít alespoň jedno číslo, kde by nad druhé vynikal. Nejlepší by bylo v posledním jednání; nejní-li to možné, tak bych ho alespoň nechal zpívat tu píseň se Skřivánkem na peci co duetto. Jinak nemá v celé opeře žádné samostatné číslo, a držel by tu roly za episodní, tak že by jí snad ani nechtěl převzít. Mluvím ze zkušeností!”

42 Smetana, letter to Betty Fibichová, February 28, 1879, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 515: “Nota hudební na papíře jest mrtva, k životu ji přivede teprv vykon povolaných interpretu. Takový povolaný interpret jste ve velkém míře Vy, jemnostpaní, a jest-li jste si vyvolila k Vašemu čestnému večeru jednu s mých skladeb, proukázala jste ji a mně velikou čest, a mně vzlašť velikou radost. Přeju od srdce veškerého zdaru!”

43 Smetana, letter to Josef Lev, post September 20, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 435: “Pan J. Lev || *Bedřich Smetana*. || prosí || o přijetí těchto 2 líbezných ptáčku, a přeje dobré chutnání.”

Smetana was also willing to make special concessions for top performers. When Marie Sittová, who had performed in the premieres of five of Smetana's operas, complained to the conductor Adolf Čech that she had not received applause after Anežka's major aria in *Dvě vdovy*, Smetana accommodated her:

Please inform Ms. Sittová [...] that I leave it entirely up to her to make any change she wishes to this aria, as I acknowledge that it is somewhat at odds with the other lighter music of this opera. It is too cumbersome and tragic, so to speak. – I cannot quite remember it, not having this opera to hand, and so I do not know what could be omitted to make the end of the aria “applausfähig” [applaudable], and what is at issue here.⁴⁴ I think that as far as the entire performance of the aria is concerned, perhaps in the Allegro the wind instruments could be either omitted here and there, or toned down. – I leave that entirely to your discretion, dear friend. Arrange it as you see fit!

I would add, however, that I allow changes in this aria out of special respect only for Ms. Sittová ad personam; for other ladies, for the opera itself, and for the future, the aria will always remain as it originally sounded. For it will appear unchanged in print, and will also be performed unchanged elsewhere, regardless of the public's “Applaus”, which is often either indolent or else “begriffsstüzig” [obtuse]! Ms. Sittová has such a high standing as an artist that she should disdain the fickle applause of a few complacent listeners, who often have no idea why they like this particular number today and not yesterday? – After all, at the time of the first performances of this opera, the “applause” after the aria was always fickle; one day they applauded, and the next time they did not, and it went on like that back and forth. – If I were in the lady's place, I would simply compel the famed audience to applaud. But after all, Ms. Sittová is fully authorized to do as she pleases with the aria, and change it as she feels fit!⁴⁵

44 It relates to the end of Anežka's aria in act 2, scene 5, Allegro con fuoco: “Já, ach, jediná tu mezi všemi šťastnými.”

45 Smetana, letter to Čech, April 1, 1881, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/213: “Račte sl. Sittově [...] vyříditi, že ji ponechávám úplně na vůli změnu kteroukoliv v této arii, jelikož uznávám, že tato arie drobet od ramce druhé lechčejší hudby této opery odpadáva. Je příliš těžkopádná a abych tak řekl tragická. – Nemám ji úplně v paměti, nemám při ruce tuto operu, a tak nevím, co by se mohlo vynechat, aby konec arii byl ‘applausfähig’ o co vlastně se tu jedná. Myslím, že v pádu celého provozování arii by snad v Allegro foukací nástroje mohli být sem a tam buď docela vynechaný, aneb umírněni. – To přenechám úplně Vašemu náhledu, milý příteli, arrangeujte to dle Vašeho uznání! Podotýkám ale, že změny v této arii povolují ze svlátní účty jenom slečně Sittově ad personam; pro jiné dámy, pro operu samou, a pro budoucnost zůstane arie vždy tak, jak původně zněla. Neb tiskem vyjde nezměněna, a jinde se bude též nezměněna provozovat bez ohledu na ‘Applaus’ obecnstva, jenž často je buď líné buď

8. Role Types

Although Smetana declared, “as far as I am concerned, there are no such titles as prima donnas, coloratura singers, etc., I require dramatic artists, nothing else,”⁴⁶ voice specializations (“Stimmfächer”) and role specializations (“Rollenfächer”) were important for his work and interpretation.

He commented on the types of roles and voice categories in connection with *Prodaná nevěsta* and *Hubička*. He was prompted by the fact that Marie Sittová, the first dramatic singer of Czech opera, wished to compete with her rival, the guest singer Emilia Chiomi, in dramatic roles of the international repertoire, and at that time refused to appear in operas by Czech composers:

Ms. Sittová's conduct greatly surprised me, for it was she who, during my tenure, earnestly requested from me parts in my operas, and in particular Mařenka. As far as I am concerned, I can definitely say that it never occurred to me to write the roles of Mařenka and Vendulka for soubrettes, but only for leading dramatic singers. Both roles are indeed dramatic, though not tragic; it is not necessary for persons to go mad or be sent to die in order to be dramatic. – Just as Agathe, Amina, Alice, Pamina,⁴⁷ etc., are counted among the roles of the foremost dramatic singers, and indeed are also performed by them, so I also demand it, and I deliberately wrote both Mařenka and Vendulka for leading dramatic singers. – I cannot help it, that sometimes even the soubrettes and beginners call Mařenka for their debuts. – If you cannot do otherwise, or if Ms. Sittová does not want to sing my parts anymore, I do not object to your casting these roles as you see fit. It is true that when composing Vendulka, the personality of Ms. Sittová came to my mind. In future, it would probably not happen.⁴⁸

taky ‘begriffsstützig’! Slečna Sittová stojí co umělkyně tak vysoko, že by měla pohrdat s vrtkavým applausem několik – pohodlných posluchačů, jenž nevědí kolikrát, proč se jim dnes to samé číslo líbí, a včera ještě ne? – A konečně jíž za času prvních představení opery této, byl ‘applaus’ při arii té vždy vrtkavý, dnes applaudovali, a příště zas ne, a potom zas, a tak to šlo vice versa pořád. – Zrovna na místě slečny bych já ten applaus slavnému obecenstvu oktrojoval, jednoduše vynutil. Ostatně ale má sl. Sittová celé plnomocenství, dělat s arii, a měnit, jak se jí líbí!”

46 Smetana, letter to Čech, December 4, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/220: “[...] pro mně neexistuje žádná prima donna, kollarturní a. t. d. titule, já žádám dram[atické] umělce, nic jiného[...].”

47 Operatic roles: Agathe (Carl Maria von Weber: *Der Freischütz*), Amina (Vincenzo Bellini: *La sonnambula*), Alice (Giacomo Meyerbeer: *Robert le Diable*), Pamina (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *Die Zauberflöte*).

48 Smetana, letter to Čech, November 30, 1879, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 339–340: “Jednání slečny Sittové mně nad míru překvapilo, jelikož to byla ona, která za času mého úřadování úsilovně ode mně si ulohy z mých oper vyžadovala, jmenovitě Mařenku. Co

Smetana's list of operatic sopranos' comparable operatic roles is a telling illustration of how he saw his compositions anchored in a European context. Nevertheless, he did not rule out assenting to the casting of singers from other categories in the role of Mařenka:

Although I said that I had not written Mařenka for a soubrette, what I particularly had in mind were the sort that appear in farces, etc. I cannot, however, prevent talented singers who are not so-called dramatic singers trying out roles similar to that of Mařenka, Vendulka, etc. Nor do I want to. After all, women dramatic singers definitely sing all sorts of roles so long as they garner applause. – I was always of the view that the division of singing into different classes was an outmoded practice taken from the repertory members of the theater, where there is a proper miscellany of titles such as Liebhaber, Held, komischer Alter, Intriguant [Beau, Hero, Funny Old Man, Schemer] etc., even though those ladies would probably play any role, so long as it wins them applause. So I think that Ms. Lausmannová⁴⁹ cannot resist the temptation to play the role of Mařenka, particularly since she demonstrates a talent for such roles. In saying this, I have no intention of disparaging in the slightest Ms. Sittová's performances. On the contrary, I have always been amazed how such an outstanding artist has remained constantly loyal to Mařenka even though, according to her teacher, Mr. Pivoda,⁵⁰ this is such a slight role.⁵¹

se mně týče, tak mohu určitě tvrdit, že mně nikdy nenapadlo, ulohy Mařenky a Vendulky pro soubretty napsat, nybrž pro první dramatické zpěvačky. Ulohy obě jsou vším právem dramaticky ač né tragicky; není zapotřeby, aby se osoby buď zbláznily, aneb smrti pošly, aby byly dramaticky. – Tak jako se Agathy, Amíny, Alici, Pamíny a. t. d. počítají mezi ulohy prvních dramatických zpěvaček, a skutečně taky od nich se provozují, tak si to žádám teěž a úmyselně jsem komponoval obě Mařenku i Vendulku pro první dramatické zpěvkyně. – Že Mařenku take někdy i soubrettky i začátečníce k svým debuttám si volejí, za to já nemohu. – Ostatně nemůžete-li jinak, aneb nechce-li slečna Sittova moje ulohy více zpívat, tedy nemám nic proti tomu, aby jste oně ulohy obsadil dle Vašeho uznání. Jest pravda, že při komponování Vendulky mi na mysli tanula osobnost sl. Sittové. Budoucně by to arcit' odpadlo."

49 Marie Laušmannová.

50 An allusion to a review in which František Pivoda wrote that it was inappropriate to judge the singer's abilities "in the slight role of Mařenka." František Pivoda, "Divadlo, literatura a umění. Opera," *Pokrok* 2, no. 52 (February 22, 1870): [2]–[3].

51 Smetana, letter to Čech, December 9, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 453–454: "Ačkoliv jsem ten výrok pronesl, že jsem Mařenku nepsal pro subrettu, tak jsem měl nejvíce na mysli subrettku, jak se ve fraškách a. t. d. objevuje. Nemohu ale a nechci talentovaným zpěvkyním zabránit, třebas nebyli tak nazvané dramatické zpěvačky, aby se nepokusily v ulohách podobných jako je Mařenka, Vendulka a. t. d. Vždyť zpívají rozhodně dramatické zpěvačky vžemožné partie na světě, jen když utržejí applaus. – Já jsem byl vždy toho náhledu, že rozdělování zpěvu na rozličné střídy je zastaralý způsob vzaty z činoherních

In a letter to his librettist Eliška Krásnohorská he also betrays his ambition to be a composer of a European format:

I would also like some comic character à la Dottore Bartolo in the “Barber” or the burgomaster in “The Tsar and Carpenter,”⁵² which will be comic of itself and will become even more effective through the music. But those are just my private whims and I don’t intend in any way to stipulate what characters you should write into your future text. I would simply like to take a shot at it because so far I have done so little, almost nothing in that genre. – Of course I don’t have in mind characters such as in those operas, but something original of your own creation.⁵³

Smetana also countered objections to the libretto of Čertova stěna by comparing it to the international repertoire:

What bothers Procházka the most is that the devil is not going to show up in the world nowadays (!!) according to him.⁵⁴ In his spitefulness, he forgot that the play represents a time where the devil really did play the

členů divadla, kde panuje pravá směšice názvu Liebhaber, Held, komischer Alter, Intriguant a. t. d. ačkoliv ty pání takofka každou rolly by hraly, jen když je applaus. Protož myslím, že se slečně Lauschmannové nemůže zabránit pokus, provéztí ulohu Mařenky, vzlášt když podobným ulohám rozhodný talent dokazuje. Tím arcit’ nechci nikterak ani dost málo na ujmu \výkonů/ slečny Sittové něco zkrátit. Naopak dívil jsem se vždy, že tak výtečna dramatická umělkyně tak vytrvale Mařence zůstává věrná, ačkoliv dle výroku p. Pivody, jejího učitele, jest tato uloha docela nepatrná.”

- 52 Bartolo, “dottore in medicina,” a character in Gioachino Rossini’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; van Bett, “Bürgermeister von Saardam,” a character from Albert Lortzing’s *Zar und Zimmermann*. They are both comic roles and belong to the genre of *basso buffo* / *Spielbass* (van Bett).
- 53 Smetana, letter to Eliška Krásnohorská, January 31, 1878, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 363: “Těž bych si přál nějakou komickou figuru a la dko. [recte: dok.] Bartolo v ‘Lázebníku’ aneb purkmístra v ‘Cáru a tesaři’, která v samá sobě již komická hudbou tím více se nechá udělat efektní. To jsou ale take jen moje privátní choutky, a nechci s tím na žádný pád předpisovat Vám, jaké osoby by do budoucího textu jste by měla vepsat, já jen bych se v tom rád pokusil, proto že jsem dosud ještě málo, skorem nic – v takovém genu nepracoval. – Toť se rozumí, že nemyslím zrovna takové osoby, jako jsou v těch operách, že by jste stvořila docela originální.”
- 54 Ludevít Procházka to Bedřich Smetana, November 7, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/840: “The libretto is unfortunately so naively conceived that it would perhaps raise laughter elsewhere; to summon up the devil on the stage in the nineteenth century is in itself too bold, especially if done in such an utterly inept manner. It would have been enough to have him appear only in the last scene.” (“Libreto je bohužel tak naivně vymyšleno, že jinde vzbudilo by snad smích, čerta v XIX. stol. citirovat na jeviště, jest již samo o sobě tůze odvážné, zejména pak reprezentuje-li se tak svrchovaně nešikovně. Vždyť by ho bylo bývalo až dost, kdyby se teprv v poslední scéně objevil.”)

leading role in every fairy tale; and – that every poet knows that a fairy tale with a devil can be performed on stage. What is Meyerbeer's Bertram, then? and what is Mephistopheles,⁵⁵ etc., etc.,—dozens of them.⁵⁶

9. Individual Style

Smetana commented on questions of personal style in correspondence with those who interpreted his works, especially Adolf Čech, the conductor of the Prozatímní divadlo and later the Národní divadlo (National Theater), and also with friends when they asked him for summaries of his work for biographical articles. He regarded his fundamental work to be building the Czech national opera, and he used his personal style to systematically fashion distinct operatic types: “At last the text of the libretto and the character of the work as a whole should also count. – After all, I have been diligently researching this for several decades, and I write almost all the time; that is why every one of my operas is different.”⁵⁷

Smetana insisted that the performance of his operas should respect their character, and his attitude to the practice of omitting certain parts varied accordingly. It has already been mentioned above that in *Prodaná nevěsta* he allowed certain interpretive freedoms according to a theater's possibilities:

I have no reason why I would not choose to have my opera “Prodaná nevěsta” performed in Plzeň? – Therefore, use it as you please. [...] But I make the following conditions: [...] That the opera be performed as completely as possible, with recitatives instead of prose, as it is performed everywhere else now, and in three acts; the ballets may be dropped, except for the finale of the first act, where the polka may be danced normally by a few couples—no artistic ballet is needed for that—but this finale cannot

55 Operatic devil figures Bertram (Meyerbeer: *Robert le Diable*) and Méphistophélès (Charles Gounod: *Faust*).

56 Smetana, letter to Josef Srba, November 11, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/398: “Procházekovi nejvíc vadí ta látka, že prý čert v nynejší době (!!!) se ve světě neukáže. Ve své zlomyslnosti zapoměl, že to hraje a představuje dobu, kde čert skutečně v každé pochádce hraje hlavní ulohu; a –, že bachorku může i s čertem na jeviště uvést, ví každý básník. Co pak je u Meyerbeera Bertram? co pak je Mefistofeles, a.t.d a.t.d natucty.”

57 Smetana, letter to Čech, December 4, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/220.

be omitted, because the chorus sings along with it, and the entire effect of the first act would be diminished.⁵⁸

In his comic operas, however, Smetana objected to omissions, such as in *Hubička*:

Please, do not perform the big duet in act 1 between Vendulka and Lukáš with the cuts I saw in my score marked in pencil. These places to be omitted are important, especially as they relate to the previous themes. It is a uniform style; which, I confess, is my own, and in which I take much pride, and which, if omitted, would leave nothing in my opera that could be called a style; for then the parts are sung in their diversity, and not in their unity.⁵⁹

When it was actually a question of adapting the work to what the public was accustomed to, as requested by the Berlin publisher Hugo Bock in the case of *Dvě vdovy*, Smetana objected strongly:

I refuse any: “Abgänge auf Applaus und Hervorruf” [exits upon applause and curtain call]: degrading it to the level of operetta. I will not add a single note, the opera was not composed for such vulgar ends, and I protest at such changes. – This would reduce my music to the level of street songs.⁶⁰

58 Smetana, letter to Jan Novák, December 19, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 346–347: “Nemám příčiny, proč bych nesvolil, aby se moje opera ‘Prodaná nevěsta’ nedávala v Plzni? – Protož ji použíte, jak Vám líbo. [...] Stavím si ale tyto podmínky: [...] Aby se zpěvohra dávala co možná úplně, s recitativami místo prosou, jak se všude jinde teď dává, a ve třech aktech; ballety mohou odpadnout, vyjímaje finale 1^{ho} aktu kde se může ta polka od několik párů obyčejně tančit – k tomu není žádného uměleckého balletu zapotřeby – ale finale toto se nemůže vynechat, proto že sbor k tomu zpívá, a celý efekt prvního aktu byl by zeslaben.”

59 Smetana, letter to Čech, February 19, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 270: “Prosím Vás, neprovázejte to velké duetto v 1 aktu mezi Vendulkou a Lukášem s těmi videmi, které jsem spatřil v mé partituře olůvkem naznamenané. Zrovna tyto místa, které se mají vynechat, jsou důležitá, a zvláště, že se na předešlé motivy vztahují. Toť právě jednotný styl; který jest, abych se přiznal, můj vlastní, na kterým si mnoho zakládám, a který, kdyby vynechan, nic v opeře mé by nenechal, co by se mohlo jmenovat stylem; neb potom se zpívají čísla v jejich rozmanitostech a ně v jejich jednotě.” *Hubička* (*The Kiss*), act 1, scene 5 (Vendulka, Lukáš): “Nikdy, nikdy v hoři svém.”

60 Smetana, letter to Ludevít Procházka, February 21, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/310: “Zapovídám si jakékoliv: ‘Abgänge auf Applaus und Hervorruf’ s kopati dle směru operett. Já nepřidělám ani notu, nebyla opera na takové spřosté konce komponovaná, a protestuju na podobné změni. – Tim by byla vyřknuta degradace mé hudby na pouliční písničky.”

In the heat of polemic, Smetana was drawn to comment on the style of the work in question:

Those gentlemen think my opera is pure comedy in the genre of Offenbach, where jokes predominate!!! “Dvě vdovy” is already my fifth opera, that I have deliberately written for our Czech audience with a text and musical style that combines the elegance of the salon with the tenderness and nobility of the music. It was an experiment—when I had already proved myself in other genres of operatic style—like “Braniboři, Prodaná nevěsta, Dalibor, Libuše [”]—in writing an opera in a refined salon style [...].⁶¹

It is clear from Smetana’s evaluation of the opera *Tajemství* that he wrote it with the Wagnerian Otakar Hostinský in mind:

I was pleased to hear that you were satisfied with “*Tajemství*.” In works like this it is an exceedingly difficult task for a Czech composer to satisfy both his own convictions and the demands of his audience. The demand for melody is so important for most of the public, so that any can be remembered easily and for no good reason, when they are heard in the theater for the first time. If it is not possible the opera is no longer liked, and it is already doomed, along with the composer; for he has no other theater, no other audience to which he can appeal. And what composer would be indifferent to the fate of his work, which, after all, has cost him so much effort? – I have seen how poorly educated—musically educated—our audience is, in spite of all the musical institutes, concerts, operas, theaters, which have been available to it in great abundance in such a city as Prague since its early days. –

And since it is important to me that every work of mine should remain in the repertoire, so that the Czech style and that of our other composers, who have as yet made little attempt at the national style, may be strengthened, I am compelled to deny my inclinations when composing, almost to deny myself, and to write in a dualism which is actually repugnant to me. – If the substance is more lyrical, as in the case of the “*Hubička*,” then one can amass plenty of pleasant songs. That is why they liked “*Hubička*” more than “*Tajemství*.” I am sure “*Libuše*” will share the fate of “*Dalibor*,”

61 Ibid.: “Ty páni myslíš, že moje opera je rýze komická v genru Offenbacha, kde muzejí nadvládnout šprýmy!!! ‘Dvě vdovy’ je již pátá opera moje, kterou jsem pro naše české divadlo schválně v takové podložce textové a takovým slohem hudebním napsal, aby elegance salonní z něžnosti a ušlechtilosti hudby spojeny byli. Byl to pokus, – když jsem se už osvědčil v jiných genrech operního stylu – jako ‘Braniboři, Prod. nevěsta, Dalibor, Libuša.[’] – taký jednou v ušlechtilém salonním slohu napsat operu [...].”

although “Dalibor” is packed with melodies in the old manner. – “Libuše” is superior in every respect.⁶²

In a Czech letter he summed up the originality of *Libuše* with a *bon mot* in German: “I consider ‘Libuše’—composed when I was in the best of health—to be my most perfect work in the field of high drama, and, I may say, a completely individual work, (weder Wagner noch Offenbach) [(neither Wagner nor Offenbach)].”⁶³

Smetana uncompromisingly defended the exceptional position of *Libuše* in his operatic output against the theater management when they wanted to treat it differently from its intended purpose: “[...] I want to speak about the status of Libuše, which I never gave to the theater as a repertoire opera. I want it to be used for celebrations of the entire Czech nation.”⁶⁴

The misunderstanding between the illustrious directors and myself is that they regard “Libuše” as an ordinary, mundane, sometimes even boring opera, but I regard it as a monumental expression of the high level of

62 Smetana, letter to Otakar Hostinský, January 9, 1879, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 480–481: “Že jste s ‘Tajemstvím’ spokojen, těšilo mne. V podobných pracech je to nad míru těžká uloha pro českého komponistu, vyhovět jak svému vlastnímu přesvědčení, tak požadavkům obecnstva. Volání po melodii znamená tolik u většního díla obecnstva, aby i hned mohlo veškeré nápěvy bez namáhání a beze smyslu opětovat, jak mile ponejprv je bylo v divadle zasleho. Jak to nemůže, tak opera se více nelíbí, je už odsouzena, a komponista taky; neb jiného divadla, jiného obecnstva nemá, ku kterému by mohl appellovat. A který pak komponista bude lhostejným nad osudem svého díla, které přece stojí tak veliké práce? — Poznal jsem, jak málo vzdělané – hudebně vzdělané – naše obecnstvo jest, vzdor všem hudebním ústavům, koncertům, operam, divadlům, kterých ve velké hojnosti se v takovém městě jako Praha od mládí své již těší. – A jelikož mně na tom záleží, aby každé moje dílo se udrželo na repertoiru, a tak sloh český i pro naše ostatní skladatelové, kteří dosud ještě málo v národním slohu se pokusili, se upevnil, musím své choutky při komponování zapřít, takofka sammasebe zapřít, a psat v dualismu, který mně vlastně se protiví. – Je-li látka víc lyrická, jako k. p. ‘Hubička’ tak může se tech láhodných písní nahromadit dost a dost. Proto se líbila Hubička lépe než Tajemství. Osud ‘Libušín’ bude, já jsem toho jist, takový jak ‘Dalibor’, ač Dalibor se jen hemží melodiich dle staré formy. – ‘Libuše’ stojí v každem ohledu víc.” Regarding the interpretation of Smetana’s letter see Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil, “Smetanovy ústupky obecnstvu,” in *Bedřich Smetana a jeho doba. Vybrané studie*, ed. Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1997), 111–117.

63 Smetana, letter to Ludevít Procházka, September 26, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 316: “‘Libuše’ – komponovanou za úplného zdraví – pokládám za svou nejdokonalější práci v oboru vyššího dramatu, a mohu řícti, za úplně samostatné dílo, (weder Wagner noch Offenbach).”

64 Smetana, letter to Čech, June 14, 1883, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany S 217/223: “[...] chci stran poměr opery Libuše promluvit, kterou jsem divadla nikdy nezadal jako repertoírní operu. Chci, aby sloužila k slavnostem celého českého národa.”

Czech music that has been achieved! – I would have to be ashamed of myself if I did not hold a work that is still unique in our literature in greater esteem, and could discard it as chaff. I am taking Libuše back, and will gladly make it available for the celebration for which alone it is intended, for a previously agreed price. The fact that I have kept my work locked in a drawer for 10 years proves my self-denial for the glorious moment of the opening of the great theater! Until at last the great stage made the performance possible. If you judge the work and its creator more justly, then we soon might achieve the desirable understanding between us!⁶⁵

Libuše is not an opera, according to former modes, but a glorious tableau, a musical and dramatic realization. – However, Libuše is not an everyday repertoire opera, so it is not subject to such requirements, but demands its own.

I am the creator of this genre in music, especially in Czech music. For the sake of a miserable few gulden, I will not let my work, the only one of distinction in our literature, be buried in the company of jaded songs.⁶⁶

Of his last completed opera, *Čertova stěna*, Smetana said, “The music of this opera is quite distinct and singular, and teems with melodies and dramatic expression!”⁶⁷

Although the music is difficult in terms of intonation and harmonization, it abounds, nonetheless, in pleasing melodic cantilenas, the parts are all largely rewarding. I am speaking here, understandably, only about the

65 Smetana, letter to Josef Srb, May 26, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/388: „Nedorozumění mezi sl[avným] ředitelstem a mnou je, že ‘Libuši’ drží za obyčejnou, všední, někde i nudnou operu, já ale za monumentální výraz dostiženého stupně ušlechtilé a české hudby! – Musel bych se rdít před sebou, že dílo, které v naší literatuře stojí dosud co unicum, neměl bych ve větší účtě a že mohl bych ho vyhodit co čochovinu. Běru si Libuši zpět, a jen pro slavnost pro kterou jedině je určená, jí ochotně vřídám k provozování za před tím umlouvanou cenu. Že jsem držel své dílo jedině pro ten slavný okamžik otevření velkého divadla, dokazuje moje sebezapření mít dílo uzavřené v pultu 10 roku! až konečně velké jeviště umožnilo představení. Račte spravedlivěji soudit o dílu a jeho tvůrce a může taky v brzkou mezi námi nastoupit žádoucně dorozumění!“

66 Smetana, letter to Čech, August 17, 1883, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/224: “Libuše není žádná opera, dle starých zvuků, nybrž je: slavné tableau, hudebně dramatické uživotnění. – Repertoární denní zpěvohrou ale není Libuše, proto nepodleha těmto požádkům, nybrž požaduje své vlastní. Jsemť tvůrce tohoto genu v hudbě, zvláště v české. K vůli miserným pár zlatým nenechám mojí práci, jediným významným v naší literatuře, pohrbat [recte: pohrobit] v společnosti vyhvýzdaných písniček.”

67 Smetana, letter to František Augustin Urbánek, August 10, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/494: “Hudba této opery je docela samostatná a zvláštní, a hemží se melodií a výrazem dramatickým!”

music, and since it gives me a lot of pleasure, I also take the liberty to write about all the things that appeal to opera singers.⁶⁸

In characterizing the style of *Čertova stěna*, Smetana spoke more generally about the style of his operas and the difference between comic and serious operas:

Ad vocem: the style of the music in this opera; – it is in short: Smetanian, i.e., the blending of melodies, even simpler ones, with an always scrupulously chosen harmonization and a well-thought-out arrangement as regards the structure, coherence and unity of the entire opera, like a great symphony, or here—most importantly—connected with a text. – This style has already proved itself in my comic operas, and also in serious ones, but only if it remains forever a Czech opera. For great drama, however, this style does not suffice, because it is taken from and connected with a text which either has no tragic kernel, or points too much to the vicissitudes of everyday human life. In a tragic opera, however, where the persons are more or less ideal, the music must be as elevated as possible in context and in integrity; in Libuše there is an attempt and a beginning; I would like most of all to occupy myself with a new and appropriate tragic text, because I would now try to bring to the general public what is fresh in me of this style, and what I was unable to do in Libuše because of the text. – For the time being I have to wait, as I have no text. It is hard to imagine tragic heroes in a time of tailcoats and top hats; but ideal heroes in centuries long past, yes.⁶⁹

68 Smetana, letter to Čech, April 24, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/216: “Ačkoliv hudba je těžka vzlašt v intonaci a harmonisaci, tož se ale taký hemží lahodnými melodickými kantileny, partie jsou skorem vesměs vděčné, mluvím zde, jak se samo sebou rozumí, jen o hudbě, a jelikož mi dělá dosti rozkoše, tak si taky dovoluji, psáti o všem tom, co rekomendaci pro pány operní zpěváky.”

69 Smetana, letter to Čech, July 4, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/218: “Ad vocem: sloh hudby v opeře té; – tak je skrátka: Smetanovský, t.j. sloučení melodijích i jednodušejších se vždy svědomitě volenou harmonisací a promyšleným plánem ve stavbě, v souvyslosti a jednotě celé opery, jako jedná velká synfonie, arcit' zde – co je nejhlavnejší – s textem spojená. – Tento sloh se osvědčil už v mých komických operách, a též ve vážných, ale jen tenkrát, když zůstane navždy českou operou. Pro velké dráma ale ten sloh nevystačí, proto že je vzat a spojen s textu, který buď žádné tragické jádro nemá, aneb ukazují příliš na osudy obecního lidského života. V tragické opeře ale, kde osoby jsou více méně ideální, musí být hudba v souvyslosti a v bezuhonosti na výši co možná nejvyšší; v Libuši je pokus a začátek; s novým patřičným textem tragickým, bych se teď nejraději zaměstnával, proto že bych to, co ve mně žije o slohu tom, a co jsem v Libuši nemohl provést kuli textu, teď pokusil uvést veřejnému životu. – Posud musím čekat, nemám textu. Tragický nemůžete si představit rekové z doby fraků a cilindrů; ale ideální rekové ze dávno minulých století, ano.”

10. Wagnerianism

Smetana was known as a proponent of the New German School (Neudeutsche Schule), an admirer of Liszt and a devotee of Wagner, interested in his new works and travelling to Munich to see them: “In Munich I saw the Walküre twice, and the Rheingold once, and I must say I increasingly recognize that Wagner is indeed a reformer of opera, and a great man.”⁷⁰ What impressed Smetana as a theater person was not only the music, but also the staging:

In the evening I went to the opera “Walküre” by Wagner. [...] I like the opera itself beyond measure and the scenery is magnificent and intoxicating. The Walküre really do come galloping in the clouds on real live horses borrowed from the royal stables. The music is beautiful beyond measure and must in time prevail everywhere. There is nothing but Wagnerian music everywhere [...]. All Czechs living here are ardent Wagnerians.⁷¹

Smetana, however, was not the typical enthusiastic Wagnerian of his day. He avoided written contact with Wagner, approaching him through friends in Munich to perform parts of his operas or his arrangement of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*. When a composer colleague, Karel Bendl, asked Smetana to intercede with Wagner so that he might attend rehearsals of the *Ring des Nibelungen* in Bayreuth, Smetana replied:

I now truly regret not having closer relations with Wagner. – But knowing his reputation for brusque and rude behavior towards the rest of the musical world, with the exception of Liszt, I did not care to get acquainted with him, and even avoided it where I could; for I am also sensitive, and I cannot abide insulting behavior towards myself. And that is how it came about that I never met Wagner in person.⁷²

70 Smetana, letter to Bettina Smetanová, July 22, 1870, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 2, 292: “V Mníchově jsem viděl dvakrát Wallküre a jednou Rheingold, a musím říci, že tím více poznávám, že Wagner je v skutku reformátor opery, a velký muž.”

71 Ibid., 288–289: “Večir jsem byl v opeře ‘Wallküre’ od Wagnera. [...] Opera samma se mně nad míru líbí a scenerie je velkolepá a omámující. Wallküry skutečně v oblacích na koních v gallopu přijedou, na skutečných živých koních s královské marštalle vypučených. Hudba je nad míru krásná a musí časem zvítězit všude. Vůbec tady je všude slyšet jen Wagnerovská hudba [...]. Naše zde žijící Čechové jsou všickni zuřiví Wagnerianové.”

72 Smetana, letter to Karel Bendl, July 24, 1875, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 116: “Lituji teď opravdově, že nemám s Wagnerem blíží stýky. – Ale znaje pověst o jeho příkré a hrubé chování se proti celému ostatnímu světu hudebnímu, vyjímaje Lízta, nedbal jsem o seznámení se s ním, ano i vyhybal jsem se tomu, kde jsem mohl; neb jsem též citlivý, a urážlivé chování proti mně nesnesu. A tak to přišlo, že s Wagnerem osobně jsem nikdy se nesetkal.”

It was precisely as a Wagnerian that Smetana was sensitive about his work—especially his opera *Dalibor*—being labelled Wagnerian: “In ‘*Dalibor*’ absolute music prevails, there is nothing of *Wagner*—Liszt, who heard the whole of *Dalibor* at the piano, said so himself. – But ‘*Libuše*’ is special, the music and the declamation, each has its consistent place.”⁷³ Smetana emphatically asserted his originality:

I do not copy any famous composers; I only admire their greatness, and accept for myself all that I consider good and beautiful in art, and above all truthful. You have known this about me for a long time, but others do not know it, and think that I am introducing Wagnerism!!! Smetanism keeps me busy enough, as long as the style is authentic!⁷⁴

11. Epilogue

After the premiere of *Čertova stěna* Smetana announced his future artistic plans: “As for the actual operas that I would still like to bequeath to the Czech public, they are: the comic, where the entire technical art of singing reigns supreme, and finally, and above all, in a style of my own, serious opera in accordance with my study of the great composers.”⁷⁵ However, he did not manage to fulfil these plans. In the postscript of one of his last letters, written in a state of advanced mental illness, Smetana commented on his opera *Viola*, which remained unfinished:

Viola! – My chest is heaving with pride that this artistic distinction was meant for me! O Viola! Tell those gentlemen in Prague how my soul is moved, tears–!– tears! I will send you from the first act those divine melodies, that you may enjoy in delight those passages! Some of them make me—an angel! I send it for you to make an arrangement of the

73 Smetana, letter to Ludevít Procházka, September 26, 1877, in Smetana, *Korespondence*, vol. 3, 316: “V ‘*Daliboru*’ panuje ještě absolutní hudba, není nic *Wagner*, sám to řekl *Liszt*, který celého *Dalibora* slyšel u klavíru. – ‘*Libuše*’ ale je zvláštní, hudba a deklamace, každá má své místo důsledné.” Liszt heard *Dalibor* during his last visit to Prague on May 2, 1871.

74 Smetana, letter to Čech, December 4, 1882, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/220: “Já nepadělám skladatele slovnutného žádného, já jen se obdivuju velikostí jejích, a vše přijímám pro sebe, co uznám za dobře a krásné v umění, a především pravdivé. Vy to už dávno u mně znáte, ale jini to nevědí, a myslí, že zavádím Wagnerismus!!! Mám dost co dělat ze Smetanismem, jen když ten sloh je poctivej!”

75 Ibid.: “Co se týče oper samých, které bych ještě chtěl českému divadlu zanechat, jsou: komická, kde celé technické umění zpěvu panuje, a konečně a to především v slohu svým vlastním. vážnou operu dle mého studium velkých skladatelů.”

score—for string quartet! – There are no numbers. Nothing animates, but it arouses admiration! Glory to Viola!⁷⁶

It is no exaggeration to say that Smetana's thoughts dwelled upon opera almost until the end of his life.

Translated from the Czech by Gerald Turner.

76 Smetana, letter to Josef Srb, January 8, 1884, autograph, Prague, Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, S 217/444: "Viola! – Prsá má se dmou pýchou, že mě toto vyznáménání umělecké bylo určeno! O Violo! vypravůj těm pánům v Praze, jak moje duše je pohnutá, slze–!– slze! Pošlu Vám z prvního aktu ty božské melodie, abyste místa tá v rozkoši užil! Někteře mně dělají – andělem! Posílám to, aby jste z partitury arrangi[r]ovali – šmicové quartetto! nic jinák pro začátek. – Čísla neexistují. Nic nean[im]uje, ale budí obdiv! Sláva Violo!"

III. Early Reception of Smetana's Operas

From Vienna and Berlin to Chicago and New York: On the Long Atlantic Crossing of *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*)

1

In June 1892 Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) was the runaway hit of the week-long residency given by the Czech Národní divadlo (National Theater) at Vienna's International Exhibition of Music and Theater. The opera was originally scheduled for an opening night, one-off performance, but owing to popular demand it was given no fewer than three more times over the week that followed.¹ The significance of these performances can scarcely be overstated. As Christopher Campo-Bowen has argued, they played a key role in establishing "[*The Bartered Bride*] and its idealized village life" as a representation of "the essential core of the Czech people."²

The Czechs' Viennese triumph sparked a sudden, widespread great interest in Smetana's comic masterpiece outside the Slavic lands. In August 1892 František Adolf Šubert, the director of the Czech Národní divadlo, received an offer for an American tour of the work from Gustav Amberg, a Prague-born theatrical impresario in New York, but it fell through when the Metropolitan Opera House, the venue chosen for the New York performances, was closed for renovations after a major fire.³ Meanwhile, the Berlin publisher Bote & Bock's

- 1 David Brodbeck, "Ausgleichs-Abende': The First Viennese Performances of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*," *Austrian Studies* 17 (2009): 43–61. David Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum: Political Ideology, German Identity, and Music-Critical Discourse in Liberal Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 265–274.
- 2 Christopher Campo-Bowen, "A Promising, Political Sound': Epistemologies of Empire and Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* at the 1892 Vienna International Exhibition of Music and Theater," *Musical Quarterly* 102 (2019): 31–81: 47.
- 3 Fr.[antišek] Ad.[olf] Šubert, *Dějiny Národního divadla v Praze 1883–1900* (Prague: Unie, 1908), 357–359. Fr.[antišek] Ad.[olf] Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky* (Prague: Unie, 1902), 125–126. "A Great Playhouse Gone," *New York Times* (August 28, 1892): 1–2. In *Moje vzpomínky*, Šubert states that there had been talk already in May 1892 of taking the Národní divadlo (National Theater) to America; in *Dějiny Národního divadla v Praze 1883–1900*, he indicates

subsequent release of the work in Max Kalbeck's new German translation paved the way for a successful run of *Die verkaufte Braut* (to use the German title) at Vienna's Theater an der Wien, beginning on April 2, 1893, as well as for a raft of performances in the German Reich in the months that followed.⁴

The first of those German performances we owe to the ambition and drive of Adolf Baumann, the artistic director of the Brünne Stadttheater (Brno Municipal Theater) in Brno/Brünn in the early 1890s.⁵ Whether Baumann attended any of the performances of *Prodaná nevěsta* at Vienna's International Exhibition is uncertain, but he admired the Národní divadlo's work, which he had gotten to know while serving in Prague as the chief stage director of Angelo Neumann's Neues Deutsches Theater (New German Theater) in the latter 1880s, and he made a point of congratulating its members following their Viennese success. He soon thought that he might succeed in pulling off a similar triumph with the same opera in Berlin.⁶

Much of what we know about this matter comes from Baumann's correspondence with Šubert, whose memoirs include numerous excerpts from Baumann's side of their exchange.⁷ From Baumann's first letter, received at the

that the thought of taking the troupe of America came only in the wake of the Vienna triumph in June 1892. The latter account seems more likely to be accurate.

- 4 Vlasta Reittererová and Hubert Reitterer, *Vier Dutzend rothe Strümpfe...: Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte der Verkauften Braut von Bedřich Smetana in Wien am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004). Vlasta Reittererová, "The First Two Performances of *Prodaná nevěsta* and Their Performers (Theater an der Wien 1893, Hofoper 1896)," *Musicalia* 1–2 (2016): 37–54. In what follows, I generally use the Czech title of the opera to refer to performances in Czech; the German title, for performances in German. The English title is used when discussing the opera more generally.
- 5 Gustav Bondi, *Fünfundzwanzig Jahre Eigenregie: Geschichte des Brünner Stadttheaters, 1882–1907* (Brno: Self-published by the author, 1907), 81–105. Eva Mikulášková, "Hudební divadlo v brněnském Německém městském divadle (Deutsches Stadttheater) 1882–1893" (Ph.D. thesis, Masaryk University, 2014), 97–140. Marcela Husová, "Baumann Adolf 10.7.1855–30.1.1895," *Generální heslář Biografického slovníku českých zemí* [General Data Base of the Biographical Dictionary of the Czech Lands]. http://biography.hiu.cas.cz/Personal/index.php/BAUMANN_Adolf_10.7.1855-30.1.1895/ (accessed August 30, 2023).
- 6 On the friendly relations that sometimes developed between members of the Czech and German companies in Prague, see Augustin Berger's letter to his wife from the late 1890s, quoted in Ladislav Hájek, *Paměti Augustina Bergra* (Prague: Orbis, 1942), 211, translated in Martin Nedbal, "Czech-German Collaborations at the Metropolitan Opera in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Austrian-American History* 6 (2022): 14–43: 15.
- 7 Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky*, 120–144, from which I quote the letters without citing specific page numbers. Baumann's letter of August 23, 1892, written in German, is reproduced in facsimile in *ibid.*, 135–136. For the rest we must rely on Šubert's translations from Baumann's German into Czech, on which I base my English translations. When Šubert quotes from this correspondence, he gives the titles of Smetana's operas in Czech, but I preserve what I assume to have been the German titles used by Baumann.

end of July 1892, Šubert learned of the younger man's hope to arrange an operatic *Gastspiel* in the German capital, one that would feature *Die verkaufte Braut* in a production modeled on the Národní divadlo's staging of *Prodaná nevěsta*. Baumann promised to give careful study to the work in Prague and asked for Šubert's help in obtaining the operating rights from Bote & Bock. Šubert sent an encouraging reply on July 31, and already on the day following Baumann could report that he had in hand a contract to sign from a Berlin theater, most probably the Adolph Ernst-Theater. This choice of venue, negotiated on his behalf by the Viennese theatrical agent Heinrich Hirsch, would have significant repercussions, as we shall discover.⁸

Šubert was happy to assist the younger man where he could. He encouraged three key participants in the Czechs' recent residency in Vienna—the stage director Josef Šmaha, the conductor Adolf Čech, and the ballet master Augustin Berger—to undertake the same duties for Baumann, and he evidently encouraged Bote & Bock to entrust Baumann with the operating rights.⁹ Writing on August 5, 1892, Baumann indicated that he was now setting his sights higher and hoped to perform the opera not only in Berlin but in other German cities as well. That idea was soon superseded by one even more ambitious. On August 21 he shared his hope of taking three operas by Smetana in Max Kalbeck's translations on "a triumphal march of Czech music through America," beginning with a residency at the Chicago World's Fair. He even supposed that he could induce Antonín Dvořák, who had recently moved to New York as the director of the National Conservatory of Music, to serve as the conductor.

Arranging for the performing rights needed for this scheme was complicated and involved negotiations with publishers in both Vienna and Berlin, as well as with Smetana's son-in-law Josef Schwarz as the representative of his heirs. On September 22, 1892, *Dalibor* reported the outcome:

The German director Adolf Baumann in Brno has received from the publisher "Jos. Weinberger" in Vienna the exclusive right to the first performance of Smetana's operas *Dalibor*, *Hubička* [*The Kiss*], *Čertova stěna* [*The Devil's Wall*], *Braniboři v Čechách* [*The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*], *Tajemství* [*The Secret*], and *Libuše* for all European countries and in every language and for the whole of America with the exception of the cities of Prague and Vienna as well as the Czech cities that have already acquired these operas. He also acquired from the heirs of Smetana

8 Fritz Brentano, "Czechischer Krach in Berlin," *Abendblatt des Pester Lloyd* (July 29, 1893): 1. Brentano misidentifies the agent as Charles Hirsch, undoubtedly because Hirsch's wife, Karoline (*née* Charles), a well-known soprano, went by the name Karoline Charles-Hirsch.

9 Josef Šmaha and František Černý, *Dělali jsme divadlo. Vzpomínky českého herce a režiséra* (Hradec Králové: Kruh, 1982), 151–152. Hájek, *Paměti Augustina Bergra*, 186–191.

the exclusive operating rights of the opera *Prodaná nevěsta* for all other European countries (France, Belgium, Italy and Spain).¹⁰

Three days later, Baumann sent Šubert a copy of the draft contract he had received from Bote & Bock and asked him to urge Schwarz to grant him the performance rights to *Prodaná nevěsta* for all countries and, tellingly, for performances in Czech as well as in German. We shall return to this matter below. As for the performance rights of the other operas, the news reported in *Dalibor* was not entirely accurate. Two slightly later notices establish that the scope of the negotiations had been limited to *Die verkaufte Braut*, *Dalibor*, and *Der Kuß*.¹¹

How Baumann hoped to pay for the performance rights, much less to mount any productions or work out an expensive tour of the United States, was unclear, but that did nothing to discourage this quixotic figure. For the American leg of the tour he naively placed his hopes on his brother-in-law, a theater manager in San Francisco who otherwise goes unidentified. Writing to Šubert on August 21, he reported that this relative would serve as the tour's manager and had already leased a theater in Chicago for operatic performances during the forthcoming World's Fair. Baumann seemed certain that he would arrive in America to "find everything well prepared."

It was not to be so easy. "The matter of the tour has stalled somewhat," read Baumann's disillusioned report to Šubert of November 8, 1892, "because there is no movement from America! I imagined it would be much quicker and easier! America is the main thing for me." Two weeks later he could do nothing more than assure Šubert that his brother-in-law remained enthusiastic about the project and confident that it would result in both artistic and financial rewards. By this point, however, Šubert was beginning to doubt whether Baumann would be able to realize his grand plan.¹²

The first sign of progress, at least with respect to Berlin, came in a letter of January 27, 1893, in which Baumann reported that he had secured a financial investor for his proposed enterprise. Šubert discretely referred to this man as "Mr. X," a business partner of a certain "Baron Y" and, as Baumann described

10 "Smetanovy opery," *Dalibor* 4 (September 22, 1892): 323: "Brněnský něm. ředitel Adolf Baumann získal od nakladatelské firmy 'Jos. Weinberger' ve Vídni výhradné právo prvního provozování dalších oper Smetanových 'Dalibora'[,] 'Hubičky', 'Čertovy stěny', 'Braniborů v Čechách', 'Tajemství' a 'Libuše' a to pro všechny země evropské a v každém jazyku a pro celou Ameriku s jedinou výjimkou měst Prahy a Vídne, jakož i českých měst, která tyto opery již dříve získala. Dále nabyl od dědiců Smetanových také výhradného provozovacího práva opery 'Prodaná nevěsta' pro všechny ostatní země evropské (Francii, Belgii, Itálii a Španělsko)."

11 "Theaternachricht," *Brünner Zeitung* (October 13, 1892): 3. *Neuigkeits Welt-Blatt* (October 15, 1892): 10.

12 Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky*, 128–129.

him, “a well-known Maecenas of art and a millionaire.” In fact, Mr. X was Alfred von Strasser-Sanczi; Baron Y, Moritz von Königswarter.¹³ Königswarter was a prominent Viennese banker and philanthropist. Strasser was his business partner and the husband of one of his nieces. Both were notable art collectors. Strasser was also—and this is for us most important—an amateur composer.

In the same letter Baumann urged Šubert to intervene on his behalf with Bote & Bock. As it happens, on the day before representatives of the Berlin publisher had come calling on Baumann both to deliver the performance materials for *Die verkaufte Braut* and to collect payment for them in the amount of 5,000 Marks. Baumann had not yet received any money from Strasser, however, and even though deposit of the funds was imminent, the publisher insisted on retaining the materials and renegotiating the agreement in person in Berlin at some later date.

Undaunted by this setback, Baumann proceeded with his plans in a way that strained relations with Brno. He came to an unusual agreement with Pavel Švanda ze Semčic the Younger, the director of the Czech Municipal Theater in Plzeň/Pilsen, to form a joint company dedicated to performing mostly Czech operas, especially those of Smetana. Baumann shared this information with Šubert in a letter of January 30, 1893, explaining his desire not merely to engage Czech singers and musicians who were familiar with the national character of Smetana’s operas, but could sing the operas in Czech whenever possible as well as in German if necessary.

Word of the agreement soon leaked to a pair of Czech nationalist newspapers, *Politik* and *Moravská orlice*, “Old Czech” organs published in Prague and Brno, respectively.¹⁴ In both we read that the new company was planning a tour that would take it to Berlin and from there on to the Chicago World’s Fair and finally to Paris and St. Petersburg as well. The more expansive and politically charged report in *Moravská orlice* included a casual antisemitic account of the “purgatory” to which Baumann was now being subjected by Brno’s “Germans and theater Jews” on account of his flirtation with the Czech theater and his evident desire to advance “the greater glory of Czech art.” Rumors of Baumann’s imminent dismissal as director flowed freely.¹⁵

Hoping to retain his position in Brno, Baumann immediately arranged for a denial of the agreement with Švanda to be published in the German-liberal *Tagesbote aus Mähren und Schlesien*. Švanda took to the pages of *Moravská orlice*

13 Brentano, “Czechischer Krach in Berlin,” 1.

14 *Politik* (January 31, 1893): 5. *Moravská orlice* (January 31, 1893): 2.

15 “Denní zprávy,” *Moravská orlice* (January 31, 1893): 2. On the antisemitic connotations of word formations such as “Theaterjude,” see Nicoline Hortitz, *Früh-Antisemitismus in Deutschland (1789–1871/72): Strukturelle Untersuchungen zu Wortschatz, Text und Argumentation* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988), 224–235.

to attest to the accuracy of the original reporting.¹⁶ This contretemps in the press continued for several days, with the last word coming in the *Tagesbote* on February 10 in response to an announcement in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier*:

According to a recent resolution, the guest residency of the Brünn Opera planned for next summer in the local Adolph Ernst-Theater, which was to include several operas by famous Czech composers, especially the works by Smetana and Dworak [sic] that were performed with great success in the Vienna Exhibition Theater, will not take place.¹⁷

If the unusual joint venture with Švanda thus seems to have died in gestation, that did nothing to strengthen confidence in Baumann on the part of the management of Brno's Stadttheater or its subscribers. As the *Tagesbote* indignantly wrote:

It is of course a matter of indifference to the people of Brünn whether the present director of their municipal theater performs Czech operas or not in Berlin on his own time, but we consider ourselves obliged, in the interest of our German community and our German theater, to [protest] against the fact that in Berlin there is talk of a Czech *Gastspiel* by the Brünn Opera, thus obviously of an enterprise of the Brünn Municipal Theater, and that, with or without intention, the erroneous idea is spread that the German city of Brünn has an utraquist [i.e., bilingual] municipal theater.¹⁸

Baumann survived in his position for the time being, but he must have sensed that his days at the head of the theater were numbered. As he wrote to Šubert on

16 "Theater- und Kunstnachrichten," *Tagesbote aus Mähren und Schlesien* (February 2, 1893): 4. "Denní zprávy," *Moravská orlice* (February 2, 1893): 2.

17 Quoted in "Theater- und Kunstnachrichten," *Tagesbote aus Mähren und Schlesien* (February 10, 1893): 5: "Das für den nächsten Sommer geplant gewesene Gastspiel der Brünner Oper, das im hiesigen 'Adolf Ernst-Theater' stattfinden und einige Opern berühmter tschechischer Componisten bringen sollte, insbesondere die Werke von Smetana und Dworzak, die im Wiener Ausstellungs-Theater mit großem Erfolge aufgeführt wurden, dürfte, wie wir hören, neuerer Entschlieſung zufolge, nicht stattfinden."

18 Ibid.: "Es kann den Brünnern selbstverständlich gleichgültig sein, ob der derzeitige Director ihres Stadttheaters seinerzeit in Berlin tschechische Opern aufführt oder nicht, aber wir halten uns verpflichtet, im Interesse unserer deutschen Gemeinde-Vertretung und unseres deutschen Theaters das letztere dagegen zu verwahren, dass man in Berlin von einen tschechischen Gastspiele der Brünner Oper, also offenbar von einer Unternehmung des Brünner Stadttheaters spricht und dort mit oder ohne Absicht die irrige Meinung verbreitet, als hätte die deutsche Stadt Brünn ein utraquistisches Stadttheater." Baumann's troubles were a source of ongoing comment in Vienna's popular satirical press. See, for example, E., "Brünner Theaterbrief," *Der Humorist* 13, no. 6 (February 20, 1893): 3.

March 12, 1893, “If I do not succeed in this [Berlin] enterprise, I shall be a most unhappy man. I must carry it out; for my position here [in Brno] has become untenable by this very thing, and I would go with my family, with my poor sick wife, to certain destruction.”¹⁹

In this precarious moment, Baumann visited Strasser in Vienna to ask for additional funding. Soon thereafter he traveled to Prague, where he arranged for rehearsals to be held there in May, ordered costumes, decorations, furniture, and props from the workshops of the Národní divadlo, and lined up singers and other personnel for a one-month residency in Berlin. Thinking ahead to performances he hoped to arrange outside German Central Europe, including in the United States, he ensured that the singers he enlisted would be capable of performing in both German and Czech.²⁰ Finally, he traveled to the German *Reichshauptstadt*, where he negotiated a concession for use of the city’s beautiful Theater Unter den Linden and settled matters with Bote & Bock, who seem to have been holding out in part until Baumann found a larger replacement for the Adolph Ernst-Theater.²¹

Only at this point in the story can it be seen why Alfred Strasser wanted to invest in the project. “For the sake of the Berlin matter,” as Baumann explained to Šubert in a letter of April 4, 1893, he had agreed to introduce *Der Schwiegerpapa* (*The Father-in-Law*), a new operetta that Strasser had co-composed with Max von Weinzierl, at the German Stadttheater in Brno on April 22.²² It was this agreement, as Baumann explained in the same letter, that finally put his Berlin project on solid financial footing. Yet the *quid pro quo* into which he entered with Strasser was more complex and encompassing than Šubert initially understood. Baumann would meet his contractual obligation to the Adolph Ernst-Theater with a production of *Der Schwiegerpapa*; in exchange Strasser would make a considerable investment in the production of *Die verkaufte Braut* in the Theater Unter den Linden.²³ When, in May, Šubert became aware of this broader arrangement, he advised against it, fearing that Strasser’s “worthless” operetta

19 About Baumann’s wife we know only that she had been born in San Francisco and once had a career as a singer on the Pacific coast. She later suffered from an illness that left her confined to a wheelchair. See Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky*, 125, 131. *Boston Evening Transcript* (February 9, 1895): 8.

20 “Vom böhmischen Landestheater,” *Prager Abendblatt* (April 12, 1893): 3.

21 For a more detailed account, see Brentano, “Czechischer Krach in Berlin,” 1.

22 Bondi, *Fünfundzwanzig Jahre Eigenregie*, 101. C. W. “Theater- und Kunstinrichten,” *Tagesbote aus Mähren und Schlesien* (April 24, 1893): 3.

23 Šubert put the size of Strasser’s investment at 40,000–50,000 gulden; Brentano, at 17,000 Marks. See Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky*, 131–133; Brentano, “Czechischer Krach in Berlin,” 1. This agreement was likely the subject of discussion when Baumann conferred with Strasser in Vienna in March.

would “ruin the impression” that might subsequently be made by Smetana’s opera. To this Baumann could only reply, “I must!”

And so on June 10, 1893, *Der Schwiegerpapa*, presented by a company to which Baumann gave the name Austrian Operetta Ensemble (Österreichisches Operetten-Ensemble), opened at the Adolph Ernst-Theater to positive if not enthusiastic critical reception (figure 12).²⁴ Three weeks later, on July 1, *Die verkaufte Braut* opened its run at the Theater Unter den Linden in a production by Baumann’s so-called Bohemian National Opera (Böhmische National-Oper) (figure 13). A euphoric Baumann resigned from his position in Brno on that very day.²⁵ As Šubert later recalled:

After the première [Baumann] was full of the rosiest hopes, secure that he had put all the worst behind him, that Berlin would pay the entire cost of the tour, the first month’s gratuities, and other expenses, and then that the great, culminating tour of America would begin, in which he would achieve not only honor and glory, but all the happiness about which he had dreamed for an entire year.²⁶

Those rosy hopes were soon dashed. To be sure, *Die verkaufte Braut* enjoyed an undeniable artistic and critical success.²⁷ Nevertheless, both it and *Der Schwiegerpapa* struggled at the box office, mostly because a fierce heat wave kept audiences away in such a number as to make it impossible to generate enough revenue from ticket sales to cover Baumann’s enormous expenses. The personnel were soon being left unpaid and some rebelled to demand their wages due.²⁸ Both productions were, therefore, forced to close early. *Der Schwiegerpapa* ended its run on July 17, when Baumann first declared his inability to continue payment. With the help of deeply discounted ticket prices, he was able to keep *Die verkaufte Braut* going for a bit longer, but on July 26 it, too, had to close.

24 “Theater, Kunst, Wissenschaft,” *Berliner Tageblatt* (June 11, 1893): 2. F. B., “Theater und Schaustellungen,” *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten* (June 11, 1893): 2–3. *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 21 (August 1893): 566. *Dalibor* 15 (1893): 310. *Deutsche Kunst- und Musik-Zeitung* 20, no. 16 (August 15, 1893): 204.

25 Bondi, *Fünfundzwanzig Jahre Eigenregie*, 98.

26 Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky*, 138–139.

27 F. B., “Theater und Schaustellungen,” *Berliner neueste Nachrichten* (July 2, 1893): 2–3. Heinrich Neumann, “Die verkaufte Braut,” *Berliner Tageblatt, Montags-Ausgabe* (July 3, 1893): 1. “Theater- und Kunstdenken,” *Neue Freie Presse* (July 8, 1893): 7. *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 21 (1893): 566. *Dalibor* 15 (1893): 310.

28 Hájek, *Paměti Augustina Bergra*, 188. Šmaha and Černý, *Dělali jsme divadlo*, 151–152.

Baumann had risked everything on Berlin, in effect even his job in Brno, and now he was left in financial ruin.²⁹

Adolph Crull-Theater.
 Sonnabend, 10. Juni.
Erstes Gastspiel des Oesterreichischen Operetten-Ensembles des Directors Adolph Baumann aus Brünn. Unter persönlicher Leitung des Herrn Max von Weinzierl.
 Zum ersten Male:
Der Schwiegerpapa.
 Operette in 3 Acten v. Zell u. Ascher.
 Musik von A. Straßer u. M. v. Weinzierl.
 In Scene gesetzt vom Director Adolph Baumann.
 Baron Raoul de Lohé,
 Capitain Hr. Spielmann,
 Bertrand de Gabet,
 Capitain Hr. Körner,
 Dumont, Lieutenant Hr. Müdmeyer,
 Wafflord, Lieutenant Hr. Rodenhau,
 De la Tour, Lieuten. Hr. Stenz,
 eines Chasseur d'Afrique - Regiments
 der Französi. Occupations-Armee.
 Zuleima, eine reiche
 Syrische Wittwe Fr. Pöhsner.
 Regia, ihre Stief-
 tochter Fr. Gzillag.
 Fatime, ihre Nichte Fr. Grieger.
 Manotte Chicard, eine
 Pariser Marchande
 des modes, Bap-
 tistes Braut Fr. Tornay.
 Baptiste Maillot, To-
 ches Ordonnanz Hr. Siegm. Nagler.
 Abdalla, Notar, Hr. Lunzer,
 Hassan, Kaufmann, Hr. Leop. Nagler,
 Maroniten.
 Ali, Hr. Frenzel,
 Ibrahim, Hr. Walter,
 Hafi, Hr. Frey,
 Drusen.
 Hafschi, Hassans
 Diener Hr. Hartl.
 Betia, Dienerin bei
 Zuleima Fr. Hansch.
 Ein Muezzim Hr. Verschall.
 Anfang 7 1/2 Uhr. Ende 10 1/4 Uhr.
 Sonntag. Zum 2. Male: **Der
 Schwiegerpapa.**

Figure 12: Newspaper advertisement, *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung, Morgen-Ausgabe* (June 10, 1893): 12

To make ends meet, Baumann worked as the director of a Berlin insurance agency while establishing himself in the German capital as a theater and concert agent. Yet the recent *Krach* had left him with substantial debts and legal matters to settle, not only with Strasser (Mr. X) and Königswarter (Baron Y), but also with

29 *Dalibor* 15 (1893): 310. *Neuer Theater-Almanach* 5 (1894): 115–116 (where the date of the closing of *Der Schwiegerpapa* is erroneously given as June 17).

a third investor whom Šubert identified as Mr. Z, as well as with Josef Schwarz. Then there was the matter of the 5,000 Marks Baumann had paid to Bote & Bock, some of which he hoped to recover since this payment was to have given him the performance rights for *Die verkaufte Braut* not only for Berlin but also for the ensuing tour that never materialized. Baumann explained all this to Šubert in a genuine *cri de cœur* dated September 24, 1893. With Šubert's help, he was quickly able to come to an amicable settlement with Schwarz regarding the unpaid performance rights for *Der Kuß*, and he skirted a lawsuit evidently related to the matter of theater concessions. Still, for the rest of his short life, he would remain under considerable financial pressure brought on by the failed Berlin project.

Theater Unter den Linden.
 (Böhm. National-Oper unter d. Direct. v.
Ad. Baumann. Ensemble-Gastspiel.)
 Zum ersten Male:
Die verkaufte Braut.
 (Prodaná nevesta.)
 Kom. Oper i. 3 Acten von **K. Sabina.**
 Deutsch v. **Max Kalbeck.** Musik v. **Friedr.**
Smetana. In Scene gesetzt d. Herrn **Jos.**
Smaha. Regiss. d. Kgl. Böhm. Landes- u.
 Nationaltheaters in Prag. Dirigent: Hr.
Ad. Cech, 1. Capellm. d. Kgl. Landes- u.
 Nationaltheaters in Prag. Tänze arrang.
 v. Hrn. **Aug. Berger,** Balletmeister d. Kgl.
 Böhm. Landes- u. Nationaltheaters in
 Prag. Mit vollständ. neuer Ausstatt. an
 Decorationen, Costümen u. Requisiten.
 Kassen-Eröffn. 6¹/₂ Uhr. Anf. präc.
 7¹/₂ Uhr. Das Theater ist durch den
 neuen elektrischen Luftkühl-Apparat
 das bestventilirteste in Berlin.

Figure 13: Newspaper advertisement, *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung, Morgen-Ausgabe* (July 1, 1893): 12

2

Two new characters now enter our story, the brothers Carl and Theodor Rosenfeld, who were active at the time in German immigrant theater in New York.³⁰ With an eye to discovering promising new attractions for the season to

30 John Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater in New York City, 1840–1940* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 119–122, 266–268. The Rosenfelds were Germanized Jewish natives of the Moravian town of Koryčany/Koritschan.

come, Theodor Rosenfeld traveled to Europe in the summer of 1893, took in *Die verkaufte Braut* in Berlin, and met its director. On July 19 Baumann asked Šubert to send the librettos of *Die verkaufte Braut*, *Dalibor*, and *Der Kuß*, along with that of Vilém Blodek's one-act comedy *V studni* (*Im Brunnen*, or *In the Well*), to Carl Rosenfeld in New York.³¹ The first inkling of what might come of this turn of events appeared in the American press only ten days later. This notice is remarkable enough to warrant quotation in full because nearly all of it is either false or misleading:

A new sensation in opera is promised for the next season in the performances of the Royal Bohemian National Opera Company of Prague. The troupe, which is said to count 180 people, will begin a tour of this country in October, and after passing eight weeks in New York, will divide twelve weeks in trips to Boston, Chicago and other large cities. Carl and Theodor Rosenfeld will have charge of the tour. The performances will be partly in English and partly in German. This will be by far the largest opera troupe which ever crossed the ocean. Orchestra, ballet, scenery and properties will be brought over. The repertory will include Smetana's "Prodana Nevesta" (The Bride by Purchase) and Dvorak's "Dimitry." Smetana's work is said to be built entirely upon folk lines. The prelude has been played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Mr. Gericke's direction.³²

By this point, of course, Baumann was in no position to undertake any such tour. And as for the "Royal Bohemian National Opera Company" cited in this report, that appellation, along with much else, could only have been public relations puffery. Nevertheless, the Rosenfeld brothers signed a contract with Henry Clay Miner, the manager of New York's Fifth Avenue Theater, for performances of *Die verkaufte Braut* in the forthcoming season by the so-called "Bohemian Opera Company." When they inevitably failed to follow through, Miner initiated legal action for breach of contract. To settle that suit, the Rosenfelds promised to secure Smetana's opera for the following season.³³

Toward that end, in the summer of 1894, Carl Rosenfeld traveled to Berlin to commence negotiations with Baumann for a lengthy season of Czech opera in New York in 1894–1895 (and to Prague to take in a performance of *Prodaná*

31 Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky*, 139.

32 *Boston Evening Transcript* (July 29, 1893): 7. I have retained all the misspellings of Czech names and titles as well as the peculiar English translation of *Prodaná nevěsta*.

33 "Theatrical Managers at War," *New York Times* (April 27, 1894): 4.

nevěsta).³⁴ Not only was *Die verkaufte Braut* to be scheduled, but also *Der Kuß* and Blodek's *Im Brunnen*, three of the four operas discussed a year earlier.³⁵ Again reports about an impending American tour appeared in the press. Yet as with so many of Baumann's earlier plans, this one, too, came to nothing, and by the beginning of the new season that fall, he would be working as a stage director at the Breslau Stadttheater (Municipal Theater).³⁶

Baumann did have one last shot to make it to America, even if *Prodaná nevěsta* would not be along for the journey. In the same summer of 1894 he accepted the position of stage manager for the eight-week season of Wagner operas that Walter Damrosch was planning for the Metropolitan Opera House the following winter.³⁷ Unlike so many earlier plans, this one had a sense of certainty to it, and on January 30, 1895, Baumann embarked from Bremen for New York on the ocean liner *Elbe*. Within hours the ship was struck by another and sank into the North Sea; Baumann was among the 334 passengers who did not survive the calamity. And so ended the life—and with it the “great fantasy dream”—of “the most unlucky man of the theater” Šubert had ever known.”³⁸

3

How, then, did *Prodaná nevěsta* finally make it across the Atlantic? In May 1893 an organization that called itself the “Bohemian-American Society for Bohemian Opera in Chicago” invited Šubert's Národní divadlo to undertake a guest performance at the Chicago World's Fair. As he had done before, Šubert declined the invitation and recommended Baumann (who was then still very much alive) for the assignment instead. As he explained in a letter published in *The Bohemian Voice*, a monthly English-language magazine that styled itself as

34 Šubert confuses Carl Rosenfeld with Ludwig Rosenfeld, an unrelated theater director in Berlin.

35 Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky*, 142–143. Baumann had lost the performance rights to *Der Kuß* through his settlement with Schwarz.

36 “Preludes and Echos,” *Boston Globe* (July 1, 1894): 18. “Stage News and Note,” *Evening World* (New York) (August 22, 1894): 6. “The Bartered Bride,” *New York Sun* (September 9, 1894): 7. Ludwig Sittenfeld, *Die Geschichte des Breslauer Theaters von 1841 bis 1900* (Breslau: Preuß & Jünger, 1909), 320–321.

37 “The Season of Wagner Opera,” *New York Times* (December 1, 1894): 4.

38 Šubert, *Dějiny Národního divadla v Praze 1883–1900*, 367. Šubert, *Moje vzpomínky*, 120. On the dire straits in which Baumann's wife and children were left, see “Regisseur Baumanns Witwe,” *Montagsblatt (Montags-Revue) aus Böhmen* (February 11, 1895): 5–6. On March 14, 1895 a benefit concert in aid of the widow was given in New York's Carnegie Hall; see “The Adolf Baumann Benefit,” *New York Times* (March 14, 1895): 8. Support for the family was also provided by a group of German journalists in Brno; see Bondi, Bondi, *Fünfundzwanzig Jahre Eigenregie*, 105.

an “organ of the Bohemian-Americans in the United States,” Baumann planned to come over from Europe in the late summer with the hope of performing several Czech operas. Šubert urged the men in Chicago to negotiate directly with Baumann, but whether they did so or not is uncertain. What we do know is that a more practical solution to the problem of introducing Czech opera in Chicago was much closer at hand.³⁹

On March 20, 1893, the Ludvík Theatrical Company (Ludvíkovo divadlo), a troupe of professional actors led by František Ludvík, landed in New York to begin a lengthy tour of Czech America that would end with a decision to settle permanently in Chicago, home to America’s largest Czech community.⁴⁰ Shortly after their arrival, *Pokrok západu* (*Progress of the West*), an influential Czech-language newspaper, reported that *Prodaná nevěsta* was one of two works being considered for the troupe’s farewell performance in New York on April 3. Subsequent reports in the same newspaper suggested that Smetana’s comic opera would eventually also be performed in Omaha, Nebraska, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.⁴¹ In the end, however, none of this happened. The Ludvík Players were a theater company, after all, not an opera company, and they did not travel with their own chorus and band of musicians. Making a successful production would require not only sufficient time for rehearsal, but the kind of planning and coordination with local musicians that only an extended stay in a city with adequate resources could make feasible.

On May 3, 1893, *Pokrok západu* reported that the players, having recently arrived in Chicago, were studying *Prodaná nevěsta* for the first time but were not yet certain if or when they would be able to bring it up to standard for performance.⁴² It would in fact be several months before the opera was ready to be put on the boards. This occurred at a time of heightened awareness in Chicago of all things Czech. The high point came on August 12, 1893, when Bohemian Day was celebrated at the World’s Fair.⁴³ Among the festivities held in

39 *The Bohemian Voice* 1 (June 1, 1893): 2.

40 “Bohemian Actors in America,” *The Bohemian Voice* 1 (April 1, 1893): 4. After two weeks in New York the players traveled to Baltimore, Cleveland, and Detroit enroute to Chicago. In late July they made a short swing through Milwaukee and a few other cities and towns in Wisconsin, and in the fall a somewhat longer tour of Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska.

41 *Pokrok západu* 21, no. 50 (March 29, 1893): 5; *ibid.* 22, no. 1 (April 19, 1893): 14; *ibid.* 22, no. 21 (September 6, 1893): 12, 13; and *ibid.* (September 13, 1893): 13.

42 *Pokrok západu* 22, no. 3 (May 3, 1893): 8. *Památník Ludvíkovy divadelní společnosti na oslavu desítiletého trvání stálého českého divadla v Chicagu, 1893–1903* [Ludvík Theater Company Memorial to Celebrate Ten Years of Permanent Czech Theater in Chicago] (Chicago, 1903).

43 Michael W. Dean, “‘What Blood Unites, the Sea Shall Not Divide’: Bohemian Day at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 115, no. 2–3 (2022): 9–56. “Slavnosti chicagské,” *Pokrok západu* 22, no. 19 (August 23, 1893): 4.

connection with that event was an all-Czech orchestral concert jointly conducted by Dvořák and Vojtěch I. Hlaváč that opened with the sparkling Overture to *Prodaná nevěsta*, which had been making the rounds of American orchestras over the past several years.⁴⁴ But it was the arrival in Chicago at the beginning of August of another artistic luminary from Bohemia, the celebrated actor Josef Šmaha, that allowed a production of *Prodaná nevěsta* finally to go forward.⁴⁵ Fresh off his work as stage director for Baumann's Berlin production, Šmaha took up the same duties for the Ludvík Players in Chicago. The conductor and music director was Josef Horymír Čapek of the Chicago Conservatory of Music.⁴⁶ The chorus was composed of members from Lyra, a local Czech singing society; the dancers, recruited from the membership of the Sokol gymnastic society; and the orchestra, drawn from the ranks of local musicians, some associated with the nascent Chicago Symphony Orchestra.⁴⁷

The gala first performance played to a full house at the Haymarket Theater on August 20. Demand was such that the opera was repeated on August 26 in the theater of the handsome new Thalia Hall in the city's Czech neighborhood of Pilsen, and, on the day after, in the large auditorium of that neighborhood's Czech-English School. Despite the last-minute haste with which the production was put together, the performances were not only a popular but a critical success as well.⁴⁸

Yet not everyone remembered things in quite the same way, as demonstrated by a report published four years later in the Czech-American journal *Slavie*. This article had been prompted by the news that Jan Pištěk, the director of the Národní

44 Billed as a stand-alone *Lustspiel* Overture, this work was introduced in the United States by Theodore Thomas on November 12, 1887 at New York's Steinway Hall. See the announcement in "Amusement Notes," *New York Times* (November 11, 1887): 5.

45 Šmaha arrived in the city in time to make his debut with the Ludvík players on the stage of the Haymarket Theater on August 6 in the title role of Šubert's *Jan Věrava* (1886). He attended the Bohemian Day concert, and, along with Dvořák and Hlaváč, was an honored guest on August 14 at a banquet given in honor of the visiting Czech notables. "A Banquet Given in Bohemia's Honor," *Chicago Tribune* (August 15, 1893): 6.

46 On December 25, 1883, the Czech-born Čapek, a violinist, conductor, and composer who was then working in Milwaukee, led what was probably the first performance of any of the music of *Prodaná nevěsta* when he conducted the opera's entrance chorus ("Why should we not be rejoicing"), using the forces, we may assume, of the city's Czech singing society "Hlahol," which he had recently reactivated. On August 30, 1885, he went further and programmed several excerpts from the work in what he called America's "First Slavic Concert." Přemysl Pražák, *Smetanova Prodaná nevěsta: Vznik a osudy díla* (Prague: Lidová demokracie, 1962), 309–310. *Světobzor* 19 (September 6, 1885): 426–427.

47 Rudolf Bubeníček, *Dějiny Čechů v Chicagu* (Chicago: Self-published by the author, 1939), 433–441.

48 "Music and Drama," *Chicago Tribune* (August 23, 1893): 4. "General Mention," *The Daily Inter Ocean* (August 22, 1893): 4. *Pokrok západu* 22, no. 20 (August 30, 1893): 8. *Pokrok západu* 22, no. 21 (September 6, 1893): 12.

divadlo in Brno, was hoping to take an opera company to the United States for the purpose of making American audiences familiar with *Prodaná nevěsta* and other operas by Smetana. (This, of course, recalls Baumann's stillborn plan from a few years earlier.) The report begins with an extensive quotation of an open letter in which Pištěk assured potential investors that he had already recruited the singers and dancers and was confident he would be able to enlist the members of the orchestra upon arriving in New York. "I am firmly convinced," he added, "that Czech opera in this configuration would be well received, as it is music of extraordinary beauty. Even hostile Vienna bowed down before the Czech music of the master Smetana!" The article then continues with a response to Pištěk's proposal. Although this anonymous writer longed for a visit by the Národní divadlo, he cites many practical reasons why an unknown Czech company would have no chance of success. He concludes: "Perhaps you don't know that *Prodaná nevěsta* failed here [in Chicago] and only national embarrassment and shame prevented the local Czech publications from recording this sad fact."⁴⁹

It is unlikely that an article in a small-circulation, Czech-American newspaper would have had much impact in Europe were it not for Josef Čapek's decision to draw attention to it in *Dalibor*. Čapek appears to have asked the journal's editors to reprint the article from *Slavie*, together with a letter of his own in which he aimed to dispel the naysayer's "delusional judgment" ("klamný úsudek") by noting that the Chicago press had in fact published long and enthusiastic reviews of the performances:

If the performance of *Prodaná nevěsta* had been a national calamity, the correspondents of the English and German papers, who were present at the opera, would certainly have taken it up [...]. Nothing of the kind happened, however, and the foreign press made very complimentary mention of the opera. "Nothing is perfect under the sun," wrote one of the Czech papers at the time, "but if we consider the great labor and difficulties connected with the production of *Prodaná nevěsta*, we may be perfectly satisfied with its success yesterday."⁵⁰

49 "Z našeho národního života. Páně Pištěkova cesta do Soustátí," *Slavie* (January 20, 1897): 4–5: "Opera česká v tomto sestavení, jsem pevně přesvědčen, by se líbit musila, anť jsou to krásy hudební nešední, neboť i ta nepřátelský k nám smýšlející Vídeň se sklonila před českou hudbou, hudbou mistra Smetany! [...] Vám není snad známo, že zde *Prodaná nevěsta* propadla [...], a jenom vědomí národní blamáže a stud zdržely české časopisy zdejší, že ten smutný fakt nezaznamenaly."

50 "Z našeho národního života. (Páně Pištěkova cesta do Soustátí)," *Dalibor* 19 (February 27, 1897): 112–15: "Kdyby provozování 'Prodané nevěsty' bývalo bylo nějakou národní blamáží, tu by se toho jistě byli chopili zpravodajové anglických a německých listů, kteří byli opeře přítomní a národní blamáž onu [...] důkladně byli roztroubili. Ničeho takového však se nestalo, a cizí tisk velice pochvalně o provozování opery se zmínil."

As with Baumann's earlier plans, Pištěk's proposed tour came to nothing. Indeed, for many years after the initial Chicago performances in 1893 there were no performances of *Prodaná nevěsta* in the United States apart from a handful of largely amateur productions organized by the singing division of the Sokol Gymnastics Union of New York, in collaboration with its sister ensemble, the Ladies' and Girls' Gymnastics Chorus of New York. The first two took place at the city's Central Opera House, on May 12 and May 21, 1894. They garnered good reviews, perhaps most notably in the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, an organ that *Pokrok západu* characterized as being prejudiced "against everything Czech." (We shall return to this newspaper in due course.) The opera was heard at least four more times in New York under same auspices over the next ten years, once in March 1897, again in April 1901, and twice in October 1904.⁵¹

4

The circumstances attending all these early performances of *Prodaná nevěsta*—the presence of a touring Czech theatrical company in Chicago and the cultural activity of a Czech gymnastics association in New York—were not typical of operatic activity in the United States, where Italian, French, and German opera sung in the original language (or occasionally in English translation) was the norm. The only hope for a Czech opera to gain a foothold in the American repertory, therefore, was in German or English translation.

Heinrich Conried, a Germanized Jewish immigrant from Austrian Silesia who played an outsized role in New York's theatrical life at the *fin de siècle*, envisioned doing both.⁵² He initially hoped to introduce *Die verkaufte Braut* at his German-language Irving Place Theater near Union Square in the 1897–1898 season, but no such performance came to pass, perhaps because Conried chose not to risk damage to the sterling reputation he had won for his work with classic and modern stage plays and new operettas by taking on a full-scale opera that lay beyond the ability of his players to perform to the same

51 *Pokrok západu* 23, no. 6 (May 23, 1894): 13 (from which I have taken the quotation from the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*). Ibid., 23, no. 6 (May 16, 1894): 12. Ibid., 23, no. 8 (June 6, 1894): 12. "New York," *Dalibor* 16, no. 32–34 (1893–1894): 256. *Památník vydaný k oslavě padesátiletého trvání Tělocvičné jednoty Sokol v New Yorku, 1867–1917* (New York: Nákladem jednoty, 1917), 83–86.

52 William Grange, "The Astonishing Career of Heinrich Conried," in *Im Spiegel der Theatergeschichte / In the Mirror of Theatre History: Deutschsprachiges Theater im Wechsel von Raum und Zeit / German Theatre: Intercultural Relationships from the Past to the Present* (Thalia Germanica, 5), ed. Paul S. Ulrich, Gunilla Dahlberg, and Horst Fassel (Berlin: Hopf, 2015): 225–236.

high standard.⁵³ That would not be a concern at the Metropolitan Opera House; when Conried took over the management of that institution in 1903, he immediately announced his determination to program Smetana's opera during his first season at the helm, not in German (much less in Czech), however, but in English. Yet that plan, too, foundered.⁵⁴

Failing health forced Conried to resign his position at the Met at the end of the 1907–1908 season, but not before he had lured Gustav Mahler from Vienna to join the institution's conducting staff. In April 1908, shortly after Mahler's arrival, Conried's successors—Giulio Gatti-Casazza (in charge of Italian opera) and Andreas Dippel (in charge of German opera)—announced plans to schedule *Die verkaufte Braut* in the new season that would begin in November.⁵⁵ This time the announced work went forward, and on February 19, 1909, Mahler led the first fully professional performance of Smetana's opera on an American stage. In a striking concession to the chronically late-arriving audiences at the Met, Mahler reserved the overture for performance at the beginning of the second act, a decision that drew notice but evidently no condemnation.⁵⁶ Notably, the opera was billed in English as *The Bartered Bride*. The original Czech title was given in parentheses in the playbill, but the German title was nowhere to be seen (figure 14). The opera was performed ten more times that season, including one performance each in Philadelphia and Brooklyn and another two in Chicago. Mahler conducted the first seven himself; his colleague Alfred Herz led the last four.

53 "Opera in Irving Place," *The Sun* (New York) (August 29, 1897): 15. "Live Topics about Town," *The Sun* (New York) (January 10, 1898): 5. On Conried and the Irving Place Theater, see Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater in New York City*, 123–135.

54 "Heinrich Conried Tells Some Plans," *The Standard Union* (Brooklyn) (May 14, 1903): 6. "The Opera Prospectus," *New York Times* (October 11, 1903): 22 (from which I have quoted here). Richard Alderich, "End of the Opera Season: What Mr. Conried Has and Has Not Accomplished in The First Year of His Management," *New York Times Magazine* (March 12, 1904): 7.

55 "Metropolitan Now Under New Officers," *New York Times* (April 4, 1908): 9.

56 Earlier that season, on November 29, 1908, Mahler led the New York Symphony Orchestra in a scintillating performance of the overture. "Gustav Mahler Conducts," *New York Times* (November 30, 1908): 9.

Metropolitan Opera House.
 METROPOLITAN OPERA CO., LESSEE.
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GRAND OPERA
 SEASON 1908-1909

GIULIO GATTI-CASAZZA
 GENERAL MANAGER.
ANDREAS DIPPEL
 ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER.

FRIDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 19, 1909,
 at 8 o'clock

First Performance in America of

The Bartered Bride

(PRODANÁ NEVĚSTA)
 BOHEMIAN OPERA IN THREE ACTS
 By K. Sabina, German Text by Max Kalbeck.
MUSIC by BEDRICH SMETANA
 (IN GERMAN)

KRUSCHKA, a peasant, ROBERT BLASS
 KATHINKA, his wife, MARIE MATTFELD
 MARIE, their daughter, RIMY DESTINN
 MICHA, landowner, ADOLF MÜLLMANN
 AGNES, his wife, HENRIETTA WAKEFIELD
 WENZEL, their son, ALBERT REISS
 HANS, Micha's son by first marriage, CARL JÖRN
 KEZAL, marriage broker, ADAMO DIDUR
 SPRINGER, director of a traveling circus, JULIUS BAYER

ESMERALDA, a dancer, ISABELLE L'HUILLIER
 MUFF, a comedian, LUDWIG BURGSTALLER
 Peasants and Circus People.

CONDUCTOR GUSTAV MAHLER
 STAGE MANAGER ANTON SCHERTEL
 CHORUS MASTER HANS STEINER

Incidental Dances arranged by M. OTTOKAR BARTIK:
 Act I.—Polka by M. Ottokar Bartik, Mlle. Gina Torriani
 and Corps of Bohemian Dancers.
 Act II.—Furiant by M. Ottokar Bartik, Mlles. Gast and
 Pechfelder.
 Act III.—Comedy: Mlles. Gina Torriani, Gast, Pechfelder,
 Bourgeau and Weidlich.

The Overture will be played between Acts I. and II.

Figure 14: Playbill, First American Performance of *The Bartered Bride*

Richard Aldrich's article previewing the first New York performance highlighted the Bohemian element of both the production and the music itself.⁵⁷ Mahler is described as "the great Bohemian conductor," although he had grown up in the German linguistic enclave of Jihlava/Iglau in Moravia. (Mahler would have

57 Richard Aldrich, "To Give 'The Bartered Bride' in German: Smetana's Comic Opera to be Produced for the First Time at the Metropolitan," *New York Times* (February 14, 1909) Section F: 7.

thought of himself as German or perhaps *Deutschböhme*.) The Prague soprano Emmy Destinn, who sang the role of Marie, is more accurately described as “the great Bohemian singer.” Aldrich applauds the decision to engage “a company of Bohemian dancers who will show the opera-going public of New York for the first time what the national dances of Bohemia are like,” without mentioning, however, the critical participation of Otakar Bartík, a “great Bohemian dancer-choreographer,” so to speak, who made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in this very production.⁵⁸ Finally, to suggest the national and indeed the nationalist element in the composer’s music, Aldrich writes, “Smetana had the fierce and flaming patriotism that is the heritage of all Czechs. For them there is no union with Austria other than that which a superior power has forced on them.”⁵⁹

Reviews in the English-language papers were uniformly positive.⁶⁰ Several critics took note of the large contingent of proud Czechs in the audience, mostly seated in the upper tiers of the house. This was a group that might be expected to be favorably disposed toward the opera in any case—and they were, greeting every appealing feature, as one critic noted, with uproarious applause. But the work went over no less well with the sold-out audience as a whole, even with those English-speaking listeners in the better seats who, in Aldrich’s view, were more likely able to appreciate new productions. Neither the obvious resonance of Mozart’s buffa style nor the presence of the many markers of the Bohemian village milieu—in music and dance and costume—went unremarked. Still, for Aldrich, one of the virtues of the work was that “Smetana has not unduly forced the nationalism, has not obtruded it so as to hamper the engagement of the world outside of Bohemia.”⁶¹

The reviews were not free of all factual errors. For example, Henry Krehbiel, the lead critic of the *New-York Daily Herald*, reported erroneously that the company of Bohemian dancers had been brought over from the mother country, when in fact the dancers had been recruited from the sizable Czech colony living in Manhattan’s Upper East Side neighborhood of Yorkville and then prepared by

58 George Dorris, “Dance and the New York Opera War, 1906–1912,” *Dance Chronicle* 32 (2009): 195–262: 207–208. Nedbal, “Czech-German Collaborations at the Metropolitan Opera in the Early Twentieth Century,” 16–24.

59 [Richard Aldrich], “‘Bartered Bride’ at Metropolitan,” *New York Times* (February 20, 1909): 7.

60 Ibid. H. E. K. [Henry Edward Krehbiel], “Metropolitan Opera House: The First Performance of Smetana’s ‘Bartered Bride,’” *New-York Daily Tribune* (February 20, 1909): 7. “A Bright Bohemian Opera,” *The Sun* (New York) (February 20, 1909): 5. Charles Henry Meltzer, “Smetana’s Rustic Opera Produced,” *New York American* (February 20, 1909): 5. “‘The Bartered Bride’ Once More,” *New-York Daily Tribune* (February 23, 1909): 7. For commentary on the English-language critical response, see Nedbal, “Czech-German Collaborations at the Metropolitan Opera in the Early Twentieth Century,” 21–23.

61 Krehbiel, in *New-York Daily Tribune* (February 20, 1909): 7. Aldrich, in *New York Times* (February 20, 1909): 7.

Bartík.⁶² Displaying a kind of confirmation bias, two other critics attributed the spirited charm of Smetana's melodies to their supposed roots in real Czech folk song, a claim the composer would have been quick to dispute.⁶³

The discussion of the opera in New York's Czech- and German-language press was especially notable, albeit for different reasons. Most prominent among the Czech writers was Jaroslav E. S. Vojan, editor of *Hlas lidu* (*Voice of the People*), who used the pages of his newspaper in the weeks leading up to the performance to build interest in the opera among its readers, to recruit the dancers, and to push ticket sales. His effort paid off, and the opening-night audience included a disproportionate number of enthusiastic Czechs, who filled at least one-third of the auditorium's 3,300 seats.⁶⁴

The first paragraph of Vojan's day-after review captures the importance of the moment from the Czech-American perspective:

We have waited so long for this evening of deep emotion! But it was so beautiful, so incomparable, that we can hardly find words to express the warmth that flooded the souls of all of us Czechs, who, numbering surely one thousand, were present yesterday at the triumph of the work of our immortal genius Bedřich Smetana.⁶⁵

Near the end, Vojan wrote with pride about the local Czech dancers, adding, "All can say with a good conscience that they have contributed their share to the great national deed of making Smetana's work popular with the Americans."⁶⁶

62 Krehbiel, in *New-York Daily Tribune* (February 20, 1909): 7. The same erroneous claim is made in Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, trans. Basil Creighton (New York: Viking, 1946), 119, and left uncorrected in subsequent editions. On the recruitment of dancers from the local Czech community, see Bartík's letter to his wife of December 26, 1908, in Nedbal, "Czech-German Collaborations at the Metropolitan Opera in the Early Twentieth Century," 18–19.

63 Aldrich, *New York Times* (February 20, 1909): 7. Meltzer, in *American* (February 20, 1909): 5. *The Sun* (February 20, 1909): 5.

64 "Ve věci 'Prodané nevěsty,'" *Hlas lidu* 22 (December 21, 1908). "Tance na 'Prodanou nevěstu,'" *Hlas lidu* 22 (December 28, 1908): 1. "Listky na 'Prodanou nevěstu,'" *Hlas lidu* 22 (January 28, 1909): 1. "Prodaná nevěsta' na obzoru," *Hlas lidu* (February 2, 1909): 1. "Staatszeitung' o 'Prodané nevěstě,'" *Hlas lidu* 22 (February 8, 1909): 1. "Co zkusí naše 'Prodaná!'" *Hlas lidu* 22 (February 17, 1909): 1.

65 Vjn. [Jaroslav Vojan], "Včerejší premiéra 'Prodané nevěsty'. První triumf Bedřicha Smetany na americkém operním jevišti," *Hlas lidu* 22 (February 20, 1909): 1: "Tak dlouho jsme čekali na tento večer hlubokého rozechvění! Ale za to dostavil se tak krásný, tak nevyrovnatelný, že stěží hledáme slov, která by jen trochu vystihla to hřejivé teplo, jež zalilo duše všech nás Čechů, kteří v počtu jistě jednoho tisíce byli jsme včera přítomni triumfu díla nesmrtelného našeho genia Bedřicha Smetany."

66 Ibid.: "Každý z nich může si s dobrým svědomím říci, že přispěl svou hřivnou k dobrému národnímu činu, k uvedení Smetanova díla v oblibu u Američanů."

Then, to close, he shared with his readers a telegram he had sent to *Národní listy* in Prague shortly after the final curtain had fallen:

Prodaná has just celebrated its grand première at the Metropolitan Opera House. Destinn, Smetana's ideal Mařenka, called back countless times and showered with wreaths. Didur (Kecal), Reiss (Vašek), Joern (Jeník), all excellent. Director Mahler conducted masterfully. Bartík's Czech dances caused enthusiasm. *Prodaná* is the greatest success of this season.⁶⁷

In April Vojan published a more expansive essay in the Czech music journal *Hudební revue* that also beamed with national pride at every turn. After leading his readers through all the highlights of the opera, Vojan writes, "And so we have in New York our 'Bride' in the most beautiful garb of pure art, in whose procession our great Smetana came and swept everything into boundless admiration."⁶⁸ Since this report was intended for a largely European audience that was perhaps unfamiliar with practices in the United States, Vojan explained that the Met's standard policy was to sing works in their original language, which effectively limited the institution's repertory to Italian, French, and German works. The decision to include *Prodaná nevěsta* in German translation, therefore, was most exceptional. And even if the Met did not offer the opera in the original Czech, it was, to Vojan, praiseworthy all the same that Dippel had decided not to put Smetana's opera into the repertoire under the title *Die verkaufte Braut*, a curiosity noted earlier.

Later Vojan takes up to the opera's reception in the New York press. "The critics of Saturday's English papers had to pull out a dictionary they rarely use," he writes, "a dictionary of great enthusiasm."⁶⁹ He then quotes the glowing opening of Maurice Halperson's review in the putatively anti-Czech *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*:

Last night the German wing of the Metropolitan Opera House triumphed under the Czech flag, indeed, it carried away an outright overwhelming victory. The masterly opera of the Czech Smetana, *Die verkaufte Braut*, one of the jewels of the comic operatic literature, was given with a success as

- 67 Ibid.: "‘Prodaná’ slavila právě v Metropolitan Opera House velkolepou premiéru. Destinnova, ideální Smetanovská Mařenka, nesčetněkrát vyvolána a zasypana věnci. Didur (Kecal), Reiss (Vašek), Joern (Jeník) vesměs výteční. Dirigent Mahler mistrovsky řídil. Bártíkovy české tance způsobily nadšení. ‘Prodaná’ je největší úspěch celé letošní sezony."
- 68 Jar. E. S. Vojan, "Americká premiéra Smetanovy ‘Prodané nevěsty’," *Hudební revue* 4 (April 1909): 176–181: 180: "A tak máme tedy v New Yorku naši ‘Nevěstu’ v nejkrásnějším hávu ryziho umění, v jehož průvodu náš velký Smetana přišel a strhl vše v bezmezný obdiv [...]."
- 69 Ibid.: "Sobotní kritiky anglických listů musily vytáhnouti slovník, jehož málo používají, slovník velkého nadšení."

honest and indisputable, as enthusiastic and raucous, as the Metropolitan Opera has seen in this and several previous seasons.⁷⁰

This enthusiastic response by Halperson, who had emigrated from Vienna to New York at the turn of the century, came at a moment when long-simmering tensions in Bohemia and Moravia between Germans and Czechs over appointments and language use in the civil service were coming to a full boil. On February 5, 1909, just two weeks before the opera's New York premiere, the Austrian parliament was shut down after fist-fighting and other acts of violence involving the Czech and German deputies broke out on the floor. Halperson was aware of these developments, so near the end of his review, he writes:

The success was resounding from the start. The efforts of the many Czechs in attendance were not needed to ensure the opera's triumphant victory. Like the Czech obstruction in the Austrian parliament, this party behaved insistently and noisily. But it soon had the pleasure of seeing that the whole audience was applauding with it.⁷¹

There were, in short, no reports of hand-to-hand combat or rioting on the night of the premiere.

If Habsburg nationalities politics thus crept into the reception of the opera at the time of its first Viennese performance, the intrusion was minimal. Matters would be different ten weeks later, when the opera was repeated in a benefit performance for the Legal Aid Society, an organization that provided legal assistance at no cost to New York's poor immigrant population. For this performance, the German soprano Johanna Gadschi replaced Destinn in the title role, and those who purchased tickets were promised "scenes not thought of by Smetana," namely, the Austrian national anthem (the so-called *Volkshymne*, with its famous melody by Joseph Haydn), to be performed by Gadschi between

70 H. [Maurice Halperson], "Theater und Musik," *New-Yorker Staatszeitung* (February 20, 1909): 3: "Der deutsche Flügel des Metropolitan Opera House hat gestern Abend unter czechischer Flagge gesiegt, ja, einen geradezu überwältigenden Sieg davongetragen. Man gab des Czechen Smetana Meisteroper, 'Die verkaufte Braut', eine der Juwelen der komischen Opern-Literatur, mit einem Erfolg, so ehrlich und unbestritten, so begeistert und lärmend, wie er in dieser Saison und mehreren vorhergehenden im Metropolitan nicht beobachtet werden konnte."

71 "Die innerpolitische Situation," *Neue Freie Presse* (February 19, 1909): 3. [Maurice] Halperson, in *New-Yorker Staatszeitung* (February 20, 1909): 3: "Der Erfolg gestaltete sich von Anfang an zu einem durchschlagenden. Er hätte der Anstrengungen der zahlreichen anwesenden Czechen gar nicht bedurft, um der Oper einem triumphalen Erfolg zu sichern. Diese Partei, die sich, der czechischen Obstruktion im österreichischen Parlament gleich, vordringlich und lärmend benahm, hatte die Genugthuung zu sehen, daß das ganze Publikum bald mit ihr jubelt."

the first and second acts, and a set of “Bohemian national songs” to be sung by an ensemble of Czech singers during the tavern scene of act 2. Among those national songs, notably, was to be “Kde domov můj” (“Where is my home”), which by the late Habsburg period had become the unofficial Czech national anthem.⁷²

These reports did not go over well with New York’s Czech community. *Hlas lidu* sounded the alarm on March 31 when it argued that “we Czechs here on American soil are only Americans and then Czechs, but never Austrians, so that the association of the Austrian anthem with *Prodaná nevěsta* makes no sense.”⁷³ Several more alarms followed over the next few weeks, all vociferously demanding cancellation of the Austrian anthem on various national grounds. For one thing, at a time when, in this newspaper’s view, the Austrian government was inflicting repeated persecutions on the Czech nation in the old country, the singing of the Austrian anthem in the United States might be interpreted as a sign of support from New York for an emperor who tolerated these abuses.⁷⁴ “We Czech Americans owe it to our genius Smetana to guard his work jealously against such a disgrace,” opined *Hlas lidu* on April 15. Equally troubling was the proposed interruption of “the purely national flow of [Smetana’s] Czech music” with music that had been written under very different circumstances by an earlier German composer, Haydn.⁷⁵ Such affronts, warned Vojan on April 19, called for a “massive protest” (“mohutný protest”).⁷⁶

Left unmentioned in these many denunciations, however, was a relevant historical precedent that dates back to the first performance of the opera at Vienna’s International Exhibition of Music and Theater in 1892. That event had begun with Smetana’s *March for Shakespeare Festival (Pochod k slavnosti Shakespearově)*, op. 20. The curtain then opened to reveal a pair of busts of the emperor and empress, around which the entire costumed personnel of the opera gathered to sing, in Czech, the first strophe of the Austrian hymn. In response to the urgent demands of the crowd, which included many Czechs, the second strophe was sung as well. The moment was heavy with symbolism. As one liberal Viennese newspaper reported:

72 *The Standard Union* (Brooklyn) (April 3, 1909): 6. *New York Daily Tribune* (April 14, 1909): 7 (quoted here).

73 “Rakouská hymna a ‘Kde domov můj’ pohromadě,” *Hlas lidu* 22 (March 31, 1909): 1: “[...] my Čechové zde na americké půdě jsme jen Američany a pak Čechy, ale nikdy Rakušany, takže spojování rakouské hymny s ‘Prodanou nevěstou’ nemá žádného smyslu.”

74 See, for example, Loyální třetivka ve Vidni,” *Hlas lidu* 22 (April 5, 1909): 1.

75 “Kroky proti rakouské hymně,” *Hlas lidu* 22 (April 15, 1909): 1: “My čeští Američané jsme povinni svému geniovi Smetanovi tím, bychom jeho dílo žárlivě střežili před podobným znešvařováním [...]. Již umělecky je ostatně nepřipustno, aby ryze národní tok české hudby byl přerušován skladbou Haydnovou [...]”

76 Vjn. [Jaroslav E. S. Vojan], “Ve věci Smetanově,” *Hlas lidu* 22 (April 19, 1909): 1.

At one fell swoop all felt as one in enthusiasm for the hereditary imperial house and the monarch, under whose mild scepter Germans and Bohemians enjoyed their independent national development and feel themselves to be members of one family: the *Austrian* family of nations.⁷⁷

Louis Windmüller, who organized the Legal Aid Society's benefit performance, had a similar idea when he decided to have the Austrian anthem sung in New York seventeen years later. He implicitly reasoned that the Habsburg *Volkshymne* was a supranational, not a national, anthem, and therefore might offer "a beautiful suggestion of harmony" at a time of discord between Austria's German and Czech nationalities.⁷⁸ That Windmüller was gravely mistaken in his assumption became evident when he was met in his office on April 20 by a few members of the Czech-American dance troupe that had been created for the production. Calling the inclusion of the Austrian hymn "an insulting insult" to the country of their birth, these men left Windmüller to imagine the length to which they were prepared to go to ensure its cancellation.⁷⁹

It seemed an open question at first what would happen, but Dippel put an end to any uncertainty in a telegram sent from Chicago on April 21: "Austrian anthem [...] must be omitted from the program."⁸⁰ Under those circumstances, Windmüller had to give way, but not without first having some fun at the expense of the Czechs, whom he teased by suggesting that the offending anthem might yet be sung, albeit with different words. "There is a nice Christian hymn that will fit that tune very nicely," he told the *New-York Tribune*. "Nobody would object to a Christian hymn, not even a Bohemian."⁸¹

Windmüller's suggestion was not intended to be taken seriously, and the Austrian anthem was indeed dropped from the program.⁸² In its place, between the second and third acts, Gadske sang "America," one of the United States'

77 k. st. [Josef Königstein], "Das böhmische National-Theater in der Ausstellung," *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* (June 2, 1892): 5 (emphasis added): "Alles fühlte sich mit einem Schlag in der Begeisterung für das angestammte Kaiserhaus und den Monarchen, unter dessen milden Scepter Deutsche und Böhmen ihrer selbständigen nationalen Entwicklung sich erkennen und sich als Glieder einer Familie: der österreichischen Völkerfamilie fühlte."

78 Quoted in "Bar 'Gott Erhalte Franz': Bohemians Tell Louis Windmuller [sic] It Won't Do," *The Sun* (New York) (April 21, 1909): 1

79 Quoted in *ibid.*

80 "Český odpor proti rakouské hymně," *Hlas lidu* 22 (April 22, 1909): 1.

81 "Compromise with Bohemians: Austrian Air with Different Words To Be Sung at Legal Aid Benefit," *New-York Tribune* (April 22, 1909): 7. Windmüller was presumably referring here to "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken," a hymn written by John Newton in 1779 but later often sung to Haydn's tune.

82 "Rakouská hymna odpadla," *Hlas lidu* 22 (April 24, 1909): 1.

two *de facto* national anthems at the time, and a small mixed chorus followed with a performance of “Kde domov můj,” the *de facto* Czech national anthem. Windmüller was not done with his mischief, however; the program booklet given to attendees as they entered the theater not only included the text of the Czech hymn in its original language, but also, in English, that of the make-believe “Austrian Hymn we [*sic*] Intended to Sing”:

God uphold Thee, God defend Thee,
Legal Aid Society!
May He grant Thee, may He spend Thee
Streams of money lavishly!
When New York comes to attend Thee
Thursday ev’ning lustily!
 May He send Thee good and handy
 Millions to Thy benefit!

If they sing on that occasion
Austrian or German song, –
If Bohemian invasion
Bares in fact the house to throng, –
Of if without hesitation
The performance goes along:
 God attend Thee, God defend Thee,
 Legal Aid Society!

Sur’ly it was not offending,
“Bat’ring” not Thy German pride,
When, Thy benefit amending,
Rose a grim Bohemian tide,
Prohibiting and defending
German song in “Barter’d Bride”:
 If God only will attend Thee
 Thursday and a million send Thee,
 Legal Aid Society!⁸³

Earlier operatic benefits for the Legal Aid Society had drawn large audiences, but there were many empty seats in the theater for this one. Henry Krehbiel supposed that this low turnout was the result of an informal Czech boycott. Yet,

83 Smetana’s Opera *The Bartered Bride*, for the Benefit of the Legal Aid Society, Metropolitan Opera House, Thursday Evening, at Eight O’clock, April the Twenty-Ninth, Nineteen Hundred and Nine, New York, New York Public Library, General Research Division, shelf locator: SHO p.v.3, no. 19.

he added, if those who stayed away “had seen the words [of the *pseudo* Austrian anthem]—grammatically incorrect, halting in prosody, wretched in rhyme and futile in its efforts at humor—they could have afforded to close the incident with a smile of derision.”⁸⁴

Considering the matter to have been put to rest by the decision not to sing the hymn, Jaroslav Vojan had little to say about the controversy. Still, he could not resist characterizing Windmüller’s contrafactum as “undignified.”⁸⁵ Like Windmüller, he conjures up the Národní divadlo’s Viennese *Gastspiel* in 1892, albeit to a different end. As Campo-Bowen has argued, the Czechs’ triumph on that international stage had served to tie Smetana and *Prodaná nevěsta* to “an exclusionary conception of Czech identity predicated on essentialist ethnic purity.”⁸⁶ This argument helps to explain the comparison Vojan later made between Destinn’s and Gadske’s personification of Marie. Vojan gives Gadske her due as an artist of outstanding abilities, but he finds that in every respect, from voice to dress to stage manner, the German soprano fell well short of the ideal for Smetana’s opera established by her Czech counterpart. Whereas for Vojan, Destinn’s Marie was the perfect embodiment of the natural girl of the Bohemian countryside, Gadske’s Marie was a city girl who upon visiting the village can only try to imitate a peasant girl’s behavior. Only by comparison with Gadske, he claims, could one fully appreciate the degree to which Destinn had been responsible for “the triumph of our genius on American soil.”⁸⁷

To close, I return briefly to Maurice Halperson of the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*. This critic hesitates “to strike up an ugly, political song” in a column dedicated to art. He wonders what had been gained by the singing of the Czech and American anthems, and he sensibly concludes that because the local Czech community fervently believed that to go forward with the singing of the Austrian anthem would be to denigrate their Czech national opera, it would have been best to do away with the national songs altogether.⁸⁸ On grounds of textual authenticity alone this skepticism was well founded. There is a larger historical

84 H. E. K. [Henry E. Krehbiel], “Smetana’s ‘Bartered Bride,’” *New-York Tribune* (April 30, 1909): 7. For other accounts, see “The Bartered Bride,” *The Sun* (April 30, 1909): 7, and “Benefit for Legal Aid Society at Metropolitan,” *Standard Union* (Brooklyn) (April 30, 1909): 8. The report in the *Standard Union* is at odds with the other two in suggesting a large audience in attendance.

85 “Rakouská hymna odpadla,” *Hlas lidu* 22 (April 24, 1909): 1. Vjn. [Jaroslav E. S. Vojan], “Prodaná nevěsta’ ve prospěch Legal Aid Society,” *Hlas lidu* 22 (May 1, 1909): 1.

86 Campo-Bowen, “A Promising, Political Sound,” *The Musical Quarterly* 102, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 31–81: 57.

87 Vjn. [Jaroslav E. S. Vojan], “Prodaná nevěsta’ ve prospěch Legal Aid Society,” *Hlas lidu* 22 (May 1, 1909): 1.

88 H. [Maurice Halperson], “Theater und Musik,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung* (April 30, 1909): 11.

point to be made here as well. With its strategically chosen but uncharacteristic rustic, folk-like style, *Prodaná nevěsta* is, as Ivana Rentsch recently observed, almost “prototypically ‘Old Czech’ in its conception.”⁸⁹ This leaves us to wonder what Smetana, a progressive “Young Czech” liberal nationalist for whom only a modern musical style would really suffice for representing a modern Czech nation, would have thought when the Czech national anthem was sung during the entr’acte of his modest little village opera.

89 Ivana Rentsch, “Das Phantasma des eigenen Tons: Bedřich Smetanas *Prodaná nevěsta* (*Die verkaufte Braut*) und die Paradoxien der Nationalmusik im 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Musik – Politik – Gesellschaft: Michael Walter zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Kordula Knaus and Susanne Kogler (Berlin and Heidelberg: Metzler, 2023), 141–161: 150.

“Outdated” or “Too Current”? *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) in Milan 1905, 1934, and 1935

But if Smetana, while being admired for his great, unquestionable value as a composer and for his most graceful inspiration, manages to be so leaden when setting to music a plot that is meant to be comic, just imagine how funereal poor Smetana must have proved when it came to setting drama and tragedy to music! And might this not be the sole reason why his exquisitely well-crafted music has never crossed our borders?¹

And finally [...] Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, one of the most beautiful of modern *opere buffe*. It is full of 'vis comica' from beginning to end and of very pleasant, original music with a distinctly Bohemian flavour [...].²

These two excerpts in the Italian press from 1905 and 1934 are very revealing. Over a period of almost thirty years, Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) is first described as “plumbea” (“leaden”) and then—three decades later—as a full-blown *vis comica*. What led to such a radical change in Italian critics' perception? Of course, one could argue that historical distance might have influenced the critics' judgments, just as one could say that musical “taste” has changed over such a long period of time, or that the “comic” as an aesthetic category has changed over time.

If one assumes that, in the processes of cultural transfer and reception, the value of a work of art is not determined exclusively by the work itself but rather

- 1 Virgilio [Ramperti], “Cronaca Milanese. Lirico,” *Gazzetta teatrale italiana* 34, no. 27 (October 20, 1905): 1: “Ma se lo Smetana, pur facendosi ammirare pel suo grande, indiscutibile valore di compositore e per la leggiadrissima sua ispirazione, riesce così plumbeo musicando un'azione che vuol essere buffa, figuriamoci povero Smetana, quando avrà dovuto riescire funereo musicando il dramma e la tragedia! E non potrebbe essere questa la causa unica per cui la sua musica, squisitamente ben fatta, non ha valicato mai i nostri confini?”
- 2 Giulio Razzi, “La grande stagione lirica dell'EIAR,” *Radiocorriere* 10, no. 18 (April 29–May 6, 1934): 9–12: 12: “Ed ecco infine [...] *La sposa venduta* di Smetana, una delle più belle opere buffe moderne. È piena di 'vis comica' dal principio alla fine e di musica piacevolissima, originale e di sapore prettamente boemo [...]”

by the adaptation and appropriation that a particular society undertakes at a particular time with regard to its own cultural context, the case of *Prodaná nevěsta* in Milan becomes even more multifaceted. It mirrors a paradigm shift towards foreign opera shaped by historical and political changes in Italian culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Although several studies have dealt with the reception of Smetana's work abroad,³ the Italian context received no attention until now. And yet the performance dates of the opera, which lie thirty years apart, seem to be very significant in and of themselves.

In Italian theaters, the process of internationalization of the opera repertoire was consolidated between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries: Under the forward-looking direction of Arturo Toscanini and Giulio Gatti Casazza, Milan's La Scala not only staged important Italian premieres of German and French-language repertoire—Wagner's *Siegfried* (1899), Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* (1902), Carl Maria von Weber's *Euryanthe* (1902), Strauss' *Salome* (1906), Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1908)—but also opened the doors to Russian masterpieces such as Čajkovskij's *Evgenij Onegin* (1900) and *Pikovaja Dama* (1906) as well as Musorgskij's *Boris Godunov* (1909).⁴ In addition, the growing number of theaters in Milan and the competition between the major music publishers Ricordi and Sonzogno allowed for a greater diversification of repertoire with an ever-increasing presence of operettas or—as in the case of Sonzogno—with the *en masse* importation of foreign works, especially by French authors such as Bizet, Gounod, Massenet,

3 See in particular Christopher Campo-Bowen, "An Operatic Locarno: The Paris Premiere of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and Czechoslovak-French Cultural Diplomacy," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 28, no. 3 (2016): 283–312; and Christopher Campo-Bowen, "A Promising, Political Sound': Epistemologies of Empire and Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* at the 1892 Vienna International Exhibition of Music and Theater," *The Musical Quarterly* 102, no. 1 (2019): 31–81. See also David Brodbeck, "Ausgleichs-Abende: The First Viennese Performances of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*," *Austrian Studies* 17 (2009): 43–61; David Brodbeck, *Defining "Deutschtum": Political Ideology, German Identity, and Music-Critical Discourse in Liberal Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 249–289 (chapter "Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows"; or, Smetana's Reception in the 1890s"); Martin Nedbal, "Czech-German Collaborations at the Metropolitan Opera in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Austrian-American History* 6, no. 1 (2022): 14–43.

4 For an overview of the internationalization of the repertoire on the Italian stages, see Axel Körner, "Music of the Future: Italian Theatres and the European Experience of Modernity between Unification and World War One," *European History Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2011): 189–212. On the Teatro alla Scala, see in particular Jutta Toelle, *Bühne der Stadt. Mailand und das Teatro alla Scala zwischen Risorgimento und Fin de Siècle* (Vienna and Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009); Marco Santoro, "Imprenditoria culturale nella Milano di fine Ottocento: Toscanini, La Scala e la riforma dell'opera," in *Scene di fine Ottocento. L'Italia 'fin de siècle' a teatro*, ed. Carlotta Sorba (Rome: Carocci, 2004), 101–145; Giulio Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941).

who enjoyed great success on the Italian peninsula.⁵ On the other hand, the 1930s marked the consolidation of the Fascist regime and Italy's attempt to achieve political and economic supremacy by expanding its sphere of influence abroad, including Central and Eastern Europe.⁶ In particular, in 1935, after Italy was sanctioned by the League of Nations for the invasion of Ethiopia, Benito Mussolini made many foreign policy decisions in an attempt to forge new alliances in a particularly unstable situation. In addition, the overwhelming and dangerous political success of German National Socialism made Mussolini lean towards a rapprochement with the countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, in particular with the signing of the Rome Protocols with Hungary and Austria in May 1934. These agreements were then revoked by the Anschluss of March 1938 and Italy's rapprochement with Germany, as first evoked in a speech by Mussolini on November 1, 1936, under the slogan of the "Berlin-Rome axis."⁷

In this chapter I outline the shift in reception of Smetana's opera between 1905 and 1935, analyze the contexts in which the performances of *Prodaná nevěsta* took place, and, above all, examine how perspectives of reception were significantly driven by a long process of politically motivated rapprochement with Czech culture—particularly Czech musical culture.

1. An Opera that Doesn't Make the Audience Laugh

In the late 1890s, Smetana's music began to appear more and more frequently in Italian concert programs. To name just a few examples: On March 22, 1894, the Halir Quartet performed the String Quartet No. 1, op. 116 ("From My Life")

- 5 See Jutta Toelle, "Operatic Canons and Repertories in Italy c. 1900," in *Oxford Handbook of the Operatic Canon*, ed. Cormac Newark and William Weber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 226–241.
- 6 For a general discussion of fascism's foreign policy, see in particular Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. I. Gli anni del consenso 1929–1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974); Enzo Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza: politica estera, 1922–1939* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 2000). On political relations between Fascist Italy and Eastern Europe, see Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Il fascismo e l'Europa orientale. Dalla propaganda all'aggressione* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1981); Stefano Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale: diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918–1943* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005); and Luciano Monzali, *Il sogno dell'egemonia. L'Italia, la questione jugoslava e l'Europa centrale (1818–1941)* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2010).
- 7 See Benito Mussolini, "Discorso di Milano (1 novembre 1936)," in Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 28: *Dalla proclamazione dell'Impero al viaggio in Germania*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1966), 67–71. See also Jens Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini. Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin-Rom. 1933–1936* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1973).

as part of the concerts of the Società del Quartetto in Milan,⁸ and the same work was performed between 1895 and 1896 by the České kvarteto (Bohemian Quartet) during its tours in Milan (March 25, 1895), Turin (March 26, 1895), Venice (March 29, 1895), Rome (March 17, 1896) and Bologna (March 19, 1896).

A decisive turning point came with Arturo Toscanini, who was appointed principal conductor in Turin in 1895 and was responsible for both the opera season of the Teatro Regio and the Società dei concerti.⁹ On March 14, 1897, Toscanini conducted the overture from *Prodaná nevěsta* for the first time in Italy, which was very well received by critics, including Carlo Bersezio:

The overture to the opera *Prodaná nevěsta* by the Bohemian composer Federico Smetana, a work written as far back as 1866 but only recently widely disseminated with great success in Austria and Germany, is a true musical jewel, and, within its genre, a mini masterpiece. The main idea, a highly successful invention, is presented, developed, elaborated, with an impetuosity, with a liveliness, with a variety of thoughts and forms, that achieve maximum originality and effect without ever falling into the banal or the vulgar. On the contrary, the entire composition, also from an artistic and musical point of view, is extremely praiseworthy for the correctness or seriousness of its style and workmanship, and while always remaining simple and flowing it stands out for a certain flavour of classicism and for certain stylistic features that bring to mind the fugato genre.¹⁰

The overture became an integral part of Toscanini's orchestral repertoire: He performed it several times in Turin (March 25, September 13, and December 16, 1897), in Venice (Liceo Civico Benedetto Marcello, May 3, 1897), at the Teatro dal Verme in Milan (November 16 and December 4, 1897) and at the

8 See the website of the Società del Quartetto archive in Milan: <https://www.quartettomilano.it/archivio-dei-concerti/> (accessed September 20, 2023).

9 See Stefano Baldi, "Toscanini direttore di concerti sinfonici a Torino: cronologia, repertorio e riflessi della critica," in *Toscanini, l'Italia, il mondo: formazione, carriera, eredità musicale e civile*, ed. Carlo Lo Presti (Pisa: ETS, 2019), 127–181: 130–133.

10 Carlo Bersezio, "Arti e scienze," *La Stampa* (March 15, 1897): 2: "L'ouverture dell'opera *La sposa venduta*, del compositore boemo Federico Smetana, opera scritta fin dal 1866, ma solo in questi ultimi tempi divulgata con grandissimo successo in Austria e in Germania, è un vero gioiello musicale, e, nel suo genere, un piccolo capolavoro. L'idea principale, una riuscitissima trovata, è proposta, sviluppata, elaborata, con una irruenza, con un brio, con una scapigliatezza di pensieri e di forme, che giungono al massimo della originalità e dell'effetto, senza mai cadere nel banale o nel volgare. Anzi, la composizione intera, anche dal lato artistico e musicale, è pregievolissima per correttezza o serietà di condotta e di fattura, e pur mantenendosi sempre facile e scorrevole, spicca per un certo sapore di classicità e per un certo carattere di stile, che quasi la rannodano al genere fugato."

12th concert of the Esposizione Generale italiana in Turin (June 12, 1898).¹¹ Following his appointment as artistic director of La Scala, Toscanini conducted the overture for the Milan audience on April 22, 1900, and then embarked on a tour with the La Scala orchestra, presenting Smetana in several Italian cities: Parma (April 29), Bologna (April 30), Trieste (May 3), Venice (May 5), Verona (May 6).¹² Arturo Toscanini therefore included the overture to *Prodaná nevěsta* in his repertoire with a certain consistency, which aroused the interest of Pietro Mascagni, who conducted it on June 1, 1899, at the Liceo musicale in Pesaro (where he was director) and on April 24, 1905, in Rome with the Orchestra della Regia Accademia di Santa Cecilia.¹³

It was not until fall 1905, however, that Italian audiences were able to experience a complete and staged performance of *Prodaná nevěsta*. Between August and September, the most important newspapers and music magazines announced the opera programs of various Italian theaters. The Teatro Lirico Internazionale in Milan (formerly Teatro alla Canobbiana), which had been under the management of the publisher Sonzogno since 1894, offered the most interesting novelties, at least in theory. The Polish impresario Ludwik Heller was to present five “new operas”: *Prodaná nevěsta* by Smetana, *Halka* by Stanisław Moniuszko, *Manru* by Ignacy Jan Paderewski, *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* by Jules Massenet and *Enoch Arden* by Gaetano Coronaro.¹⁴

After working for the Krakow railroad administration, Heller managed the theater in Lviv/Lemberg between 1896 and 1900 and played a decisive role in shaping the city's musical life. He expanded the chorus and orchestra, gave space to both Czech and German repertoire—with the production of Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* and *Dalibor* in 1896 as well as *Lohengrin* in Polish in 1897—and marked the renaissance of Polish opera with premieres of works by Henryk Jarecki and Władysław Żelenski. When he was not re-elected in May 1900 (the high nobility of Lviv opted for Tadeusz Pawlikowski, the conductor of the new city theater in Krakau/Krakow), Heller in 1902 founded the Lviv Philharmonic with

11 See Harvey Sachs, *Toscanini: Musician of Conscience* (New York and London: Liverigh, 2017), 105, 174 and 216.

12 See Guglielmo Barblan, *Toscanini e la Scala* (Milan: Edizioni della Scala, 1972), 71–33, 120, 300. As Michele Girardi has shown, the overture was so successful that Giacomo Puccini quotes Smetana's fugato in the introduction to *Madama Butterfly* that he began writing in 1901. See Michele Girardi, “Puccini, *Madama Butterfly* e l'intermedialità: un prologo, tre casi e un epilogo,” *Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* 33 (2013): 153–170: 159–161.

13 See *Liceo musicale Rossini. Annuario scolastico. Anno XVII – 1898–99* (Pesaro: Nobili, 1900), 43; and the website of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia archive <https://bibliomediateca.santacecilia.it> (accessed September 20, 2023).

14 See for instance Virgilio [Ramperti], “Cronaca Milanese,” *Gazzetta Teatrale Italiana* 34, no. 22 (August 30, 1905): 1; and [Orlando] Viviani, “Teatri locali. Lirico,” *Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica* 43, no. 2037 (October 1, 1905): 2.

the Skarbek Theater as a base, ensuring the appearance of famous conductors such as Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, and Ruggero Leoncavallo.¹⁵

Before Heller resumed the direction of the theater in Lviv in 1906, he assembled a first-class troupe of Polish and Italian singers for the Teatro Lirico's autumn season: Tadeusz Leliwa, Irena Bohuss-Hellerowa (Heller's wife), Gaetano Pini-Corsi, Ines Maria Ferraris, and the famous Titta Ruffo for the performance of Massenet's *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*. On the one hand, this was a clear marketing strategy by Sonzogno, who sought to openly compete with the Teatro alla Scala through his opera house's programming; on the other hand, the "strange case" of a management entrusted to a Polish company with an almost exclusively Slavic and completely unknown repertoire set off a mixture of expectation, curiosity, and confusion among the critics.

It does not lack a certain amount of irony that, in November 1905, the magazine *Musica e Musicisti* published by Ricordi—Sonzogno's bitter competitor—entitled an article on the front page "I tre magi polacchi" ("The Three Holy Polish Kings") and made the blatant mistake of including Smetana among the "glorious" Polish composers (only to publish a correction after numerous letters of protest).¹⁶

The first performance of *Prodaná nevěsta* took place on October 9, 1905, and despite high expectations for the novelty, the critics' reactions were almost unanimous. Surprisingly, most reviews only marginally addressed fundamental issues that one would expect such as "national character," "folk music," or even the characteristics of Czech folk song. Instead, dramaturgical and musical aspects took center stage. For the Italian critics, *Prodaná nevěsta* was by no means an *opera buffa*. Above all, they all emphasized a profound contradiction between the subject matter which was too "childish" and "rural" to arouse any real dramaturgical interest, and a great refinement of orchestral and symphonic means.

The critic Orlando Viviani wrote in the *Rivista teatrale melodrammatica*:

There is nothing truly comic in the plot, and neither is there anything that paints for us with vivid and appropriate colors the character, the customs, the life of these peasants and villages, nothing that moves us on stage, amuses us, makes us smile with that genuine smile that the comic operas of our three great old masters bring to our lips and our hearts. [...] No, it is not comic music, it is not truly merry music, in the sense that we Italians understand these words when applied to opera. But I can indeed say that I

15 See Philipp Ther, *Center Stage: Operatic Culture and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Central Europe* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2014), 105–107; and Renata Suchowiejko, "The Musical Theater in Kraków and Lviv around 1900: Social Functions and Cultural Meanings," *Studia Musicologica* 58, no. 3–4 (2017): 379–397: 387–388.

16 "I tre re magi polacchi in Italia," *Musica e Musicisti* 60, no. 11 (November 1905): 673–674. The correction appeared in the next issue of the journal, 60, no. 12 (December 1905): 794.

was profoundly delighted and moved, with my eyes closed, to feel, to hear, to enjoy the beauty of this score [...] the impeccable and graceful harmony of the orchestral commentary, which, to tell the truth, very often assumes greater prominence than the human voices themselves, so as to impose itself on them and make one wish that they would be silent [...].¹⁷

The same observations are to be found in a review by Pompeo Pasquali in the magazine *Il Mondo artistico*: Smetana's melodic form is clear, as is his "orchestral commentary"—which Pasquali compares with both the polyphony of Bach and Wagner's symphonic means—but:

Taken as a whole, and because of the constant idyllic, contemplative character, there is a sense of monotony and uniformity. [...] We are a long way from *opera buffa* as we understand it. Overall, the opera is comic in name only, in fact it is essentially symphonic and idyllic. This is why I believe we cannot rely on the viability of the opera in our repertoire today. And this is not because the opera already seems decrepit to us, but because it does not possess those attributes, not only of form but also of substance, that would appeal to our audience, an audience consisting not only of connoisseurs or the discerning, but also of those—often in the majority—who expect from music the immediate effect or the easy and guaranteed emotion produced by a highly dramatic form of expression [...].¹⁸

17 [Orlando] Viviani, "Teatri locali. *La sposa venduta* al Lirico," *Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica* 43, no. 2039 (October 15, 1905): 3: "Non c'è nulla di veramente comico nella trama e nulla, nemmeno, che ci dipinga con vivi ed appropriati colori il carattere, i costumi, la vita di questi contadini e di quei paesi, nulla che sulla scena ci commuova, ci diverta, ci faccia sorridere di quel sorriso schietto che ci fan correre sulle labbra e nel cuore le opere comiche dei nostri tre grandi antichi. [...] No, non è musica comica, non è musica veramente gaia, nei sensi che noialtri italiani usiamo intender queste parole applicate al melodramma. Ma ben posso dire d'essermi diletto profondamente e commosso, a occhi chiusi, nel percepire, nel sentire, nel godere le bellezze di questo spartito [...] l'armonia impeccabile e aggraziata del commento orchestrale, che, a dir vero, assume assai spesso importanza prima su le stesse voci umane, sì da imporsi su esse e da far desiderare che abbiano a tacersi [...]."

18 Pompeo Pasquali, "La sposa venduta di Federico Smetana," *Il mondo artistico* 39, no. 42–43 (October 21, 1905): 1–2. "Nell'assieme, e per il costante carattere idilliaco, contemplativo, si ha un senso di monotonia e di uniformità. [...] Siamo ben lungi dall'opera buffa come l'intendiamo fra noi. Nel complesso l'opera è comica solo di nome, di fatto è essenzialmente sinfonica ed idilliaca. Questo il motivo per cui ritengo non si possa fare un sicuro affidamento sulla vitalità dell'opera da noi, nel repertorio odierno. E ciò non perché l'opera ci sembri già decrepita ma perché non ha in sé quegli attributi non solo di forma, ma sostanziali che appassionino il nostro pubblico, il pubblico costituito non esclusivamente da buongustai o raffinati, ma anche da coloro—e spesso in maggioranza—che dalla musica si ripromettono l'effetto immediato o l'emozione facile e sicura prodotta dall'espressione decisamente drammatica [...]."



Figure 15: Costume design drawing for *Prodaná nevěsta* at the Teatro Lirico in Milan (1905)
(© Boston Public Library, Arts Department)

What becomes clear in these reviews (plus others that are similar) could be described as a kind of misunderstanding in reception—representative of the Italian opera scene at the beginning of the twentieth century as well as the listening habits of the audience. Verdi's attempt to revive the old glory of *opera buffa* as a genre in *Falstaff* found no supporters among the composers of the “new generation” (such as Puccini, Leoncavallo, Cilea, Giordano). With the exception of Alberto Franchetti's *Signor de Pourceaugnac* (1897), the genre of comedy—in contrast to the new aesthetic of “strong” emotions of the so-called *verismo* movement—does not at all seem to have been perceived as a possible path to “modernity” until the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Even Mascagni's effort to revive *commedia dell'arte* as a “symbol of the Italian spirit” with the opera *Le maschere* in 1901 proved to be one of the greatest fiascos in the history of Italian opera, despite an unusual publicity campaign and simultaneous premiere in no fewer than seven Italian cities.²⁰

Apart from Mascagni's attempt, it was the revival of the *commedia dell'arte* and in particular the rediscovery of works by Goldoni—above all by Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari, whose main works *Le donne curiose* (*The Curious Women*) and *I quattro rusteghi* (*The Four Ruffians*) only first came to Italian stages in 1913 and 1914 after their respective premieres in Munich—that led to a new penchant for the comic genre, which was accompanied by a certain degree of success. This tendency, still premature at the beginning of the twentieth century, would only later bear fruit, as revealed by Gianni Schicchi from Puccini's *Trittico* (1918).²¹

If the genre of *opera buffa* had become problematic after Rossini and Verdi for aesthetic and compositional reasons, new genres of entertainment—particularly the importing of French and Viennese operetta—filled the gap and prompted some Italian composers to devote themselves to this “new” genre. But as Carlotta Sorba has stated, “the entire history of the Italian version of operetta

19 See in particular Alan Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 274–293 (chapter “Comic Opera”). For a broader discussion on the problem of the “comic” genre in Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth century, see Johannes Streicher, “Appunti sull'opera buffa tra *Falstaff* (1893) e Gianni Schicchi (1918),” in *Tendenze della musica teatrale italiana all'inizio del Novecento. Atti del IV convegno internazionale “Ruggero Leoncavallo nel suo tempo,”* ed. Lorenza Guiot and Jürgen Maehder (Milan: Sonzogno, 2005), 69–100.

20 See Alan Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 129–150.

21 See in particular Virgilio Bernardoni, *La maschera e la favola nell'opera italiana del primo Novecento* (Venice: Fondazione Levi, 1986); Johannes Streicher, “*Falstaff* und die Folgen: l'Arlecchino moltiplicato. Zur Suche nach der lustigen Person in der italienischen Oper seit der Jahrhundertwende,” in *Die lustige Person auf der Bühne. Gesammelte Vorträge des Salzburger Symposions 1993*, ed. Peter Csobádi, et al. (Anif: Müller-Speiser, 1994), 273–188; and Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 414–440.

was marked from the start by a greater element of clownishness and a comic, bawdy tone that signaled its distance from the lyric opera, the Italian genre par excellence [...].”²²

While many critics increasingly viewed the Italian version of operetta as a lascivious form of theater that relied on light, vulgar, and often sexual innuendo, its enormous success with audiences led to a profound change in opera production with the founding of Italian operetta companies (there were some thirty-seven across the peninsula at the beginning of the twentieth century). Venues devoted mostly to operettas such as the Teatro Dal Verme in Milan became an increasingly attractive economic advantage for publishers.²³

In other words, by the beginning of the twentieth century, operetta had not only set itself apart from *opera seria* through its specific characteristics, but it had also become a dangerous competitor. It is therefore not surprising that the relationship between operetta imported from abroad and *Italian* opera, not only *buffa* but also *seria*, was at the center of critical discourse about Italian music and culture.

In 1905, the journalist and comedy writer Parmenio Bettoli published a polemical article on the corrupting effect of operetta, which he accused of having literally destroyed the “gentle and honest” *opera buffa*, and in which he called for a return to Rossini so that the “Italian muse” could be revived and triumph again.²⁴ Also in 1905, two days after the Italian premiere of *Prodaná nevěsta*, Innocenzo Cappa provocatively called on Italian composers to write operettas in his article “A proposito dell’operetta” (“About Operetta”), because “laughing and kissing onstage serves people better than gruesome knife-stabbing and endless melancholy.”²⁵

This dichotomy between tradition and change on the Italian operatic landscape becomes even clearer when one considers the seasons of the Milanese theatres in 1905: La Scala closed its season with a production of Rossini’s *Barbiere di Siviglia* (fifteen years after the last performance of this opera at La Scala) and a spectacular revival of Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* (ninety years after its first performance at La Scala), while the Fossati Theatre presented an

22 See Carlotta Sorba, “The Origins of the Entertainment Industry: The Operetta in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 11, no. 3 (2006): 282–302: 287.

23 See Valeria De Lucca, “Operetta in Italy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Operetta*, ed. Anastasia Belina-Johnson and Derek B. Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 220–231.

24 See Parmenio Bettoli, “L’opera buffa,” *Rivista teatrale italiana* 5, no. 9 (January 1905): 10–12.

25 Innocenzo Cappa, “A proposito dell’operetta,” *Il mondo artistico* 39, no. 40–41 (October 11, 1905): 1–2: “[...] ridere e baciarsi sul palcoscenico dovrebbe servire alla razza più che truci coltellate o le melanconie senza conclusione [...]”

entire season of “opere giocose”²⁶ and Marchetti’s operetta company at the Teatro Olympia was an undisputed success. On the “gruesome” or “melancholy” side, to paraphrase Innocenzo Cappa, Toscanini wanted to push through a revival of Alfredo Catalani’s *La Wally* with a new finale that had not been performed since the composer’s death, while the Teatro Dal Verme presented the Milan premiere of the second version of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the rather cold reception by the Italian audience did not spare *Halka* and *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* either, so that Heller, faced with the loss of the considerable sum of more than 50,000 lire in a single month, decided to end the season prematurely and forego the performances of Paderewski’s and Coronaro’s operas.²⁷

But back to Smetana: how could his *Prodaná nevěsta* fit into this operatic landscape? The misunderstanding in reception that I have already mentioned happened because it was impossible for critics and audiences alike to place this opera in the context of expectations. Smetana’s opera had none of the frivolity and piquancy of operettas, and the soft, rural subject matter was not even in line with the fashion of so-called “bourgeois opera.”²⁸ At the same time, the music of *Prodaná nevěsta* was too “symphonic” and musically too “refined” (in other words, too German) to be categorized within the conventions of traditional *opera buffa*. This explains the insistence of almost all reviewers on the opera’s supposedly anti-comic character. In the process of reception, *Prodaná nevěsta* was not perceived as an opera, per se, but rather as a projection surface for one’s own dismay at changing Italian musical taste and the difficult distinction between operatic genres in the field of tension between “art” and pure “entertainment.”

In the words of the critic Orlando Viviani, *Prodaná nevěsta* was an opera “that should be heard but not necessarily seen.” And indeed, for the next nearly thirty years, only its overture remained in Italian repertoire.

26 The following “opere giocose” were scheduled: *Tutti in maschera* by Carlo Pedrotti (1856), *Carnevale di Venezia* by Errico Petrella (1851); *Pipelet* by Serafino Amedeo De Ferrari; *Don Pasquale* (1843) and *Lajo nell’imbarazzo* (1824) by Donizetti; *Le donne curiose* by Emilio Usiglio (1879); *Crispino e la comare* by Luigi and Federico Ricci (1850); *Il ventaglio* by Pietro Raimondi (1831). See *Gazzetta Teatrale Italiana* 34, no. 22 (August 30, 1905): 1.

27 See *Gazzetta teatrale italiana* 34, no. 29 (November 10, 1905): 3.

28 See Stefano Scardovi, *L’opera dei bassifondi. Il melodramma ‘plebeo’ nel verismo italiano* (Lucca: LIM, 1994); and Francesca Socrate, “Commedia borghese e crisi di fine secolo,” in *Scene di fine Ottocento*, 21–59.



Figure 16: Costume design drawing for *Prodaná nevěsta* at the Teatro Lirico in Milan (1905) (© Boston Public Library, Arts Department)

2. A “Sposa” in the Shadow of Fascism

The long period leading up to the second performance of Smetana’s opera in Italy was characterized by profound socio-political changes and, above all, by new directions in foreign policy. As Stefano Santoro has revealed, from the final years of the First World War until the rise of fascism and the outbreak of the Second World War, Italy developed a strong political interest in Eastern and Central Europe, particularly the newly founded Czechoslovakia.²⁹ There was in fact political solidarity between Italy and Czechoslovakia even before the official proclamation of the republic in October 1918. In January 1917, Italy supported Czech independence efforts by founding the *Comitato italiano per l’indipendenza cecoslovacca* (Italian Committee for Czech Independence) and legitimized the deployment of a Czech army corps on Italian soil that fought on the Adrian front.³⁰ The intention was of course not only “anti-revisionist,” so as to consolidate the common interests of countries that had emerged around Italy following the collapse of the Austrian Empire, but also “expansionist,” so as to draw these countries politically and culturally into the Italian sphere of influence.³¹

It is no coincidence that in the immediate post-war period, several treaties were concluded between Italy and Central and Eastern European countries aiming at entirely common views about the stabilization of the new European geopolitical reality.³² The nation to which Italy initially devoted the most attention was Czechoslovakia, which was strategically located in Central Europe and at the center of the political and economic expansion efforts of various powers, partly to contain French influence, especially after Paris’s support for the Little Entente between Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.³³

In this context, “cultural diplomacy” developed parallel to traditional diplomacy with the aim of attaining a potential hegemonic role for Italy in Czechoslovakia. However, this process of cultural transfer functioned in two

29 Santoro, *L’Italia e l’Europa orientale*, 235–240. See also Stefano Santoro, “The Cultural Penetration of Fascist Italy Abroad and in Eastern Europe,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 36–66.

30 See in particular, Daniel Perman, *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia 1914–1920* (Leiden: Brill, 1962); Francesco Caccamo, “Italia e Cecoslovacchia negli anni Venti,” *Nuova storia contemporanea* 2 (2000): 59–76; Michal Kšiňan and Juraj Babjá, “Italian-Czechoslovak Military Cooperation (1918–1919) in the Official Historical Memory of the Interwar Period,” *Forum Historiae* 15, no. 1 (2021): 92–109.

31 Santoro, *L’Italia e l’Europa orientale*, 81–93.

32 Monzali, *Il sogno dell’egemonia*, 37–41.

33 See Francesco Caccamo, “Un’occasione mancata. L’Italia, la Cecoslovacchia e la crisi dell’Europa centrale, 1918–1938,” *Nuova rivista storica* 99, no. 1 (2015): 111–158; 117–122.

respects: exporting Italian culture in the name of a supposed “Latinness” with European-Christian roots, but also creating conditions for Czech culture to spread and be assimilated in Italy.

Immediately after the war, the first chairs of Slavic studies were established in Italy, and in 1921, at the initiative of the head of the press office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amedeo Giannini, the Istituto per l’Europa Orientale (Institute for Eastern Europe) was founded following the intense exchange between Italian and Eastern European intellectuals. Moreover, in 1922, the very first Istituto italiano di cultura all’estero (Institute for Italian Culture Abroad) was founded in Prague (based in the former Wälsches Spital/Vlašský špitál), “with the aim of spreading and deepening knowledge of Italian culture in Czechoslovakia and facilitating mutual intellectual and artistic relations between the two countries by means of all appropriate resources.”³⁴

The greatest rapprochement in diplomatic relations between the two countries was achieved in 1924, still in the wake of cooperation with the successor states of the Habsburg Empire. An Italian-Czech anti-revisionist cooperation pact was agreed upon in July 1924, meeting with praise from numerous specialist publications.³⁵ Among them is an entire issue of *L’Europa Orientale*, which alongside various articles about the political and cultural relations between the two nations, also contains an essay on Italian-Czech musical relations by Jan Löwenbach (probably the first and, to this day, one of the few studies on this subject).³⁶

The lawyer, writer (and future librettist of Bohuslav Martinů) provides an overview of the influence of Italian music on Czech music and, above all, the musical exchange between the two nations in the field of opera, including a sketch of the “new current” of national music introduced by Smetana, which, however, “owes much to Italian opera buffa, especially in his *Prodaná nevěsta*.”³⁷ Löwenbach concludes with a reference to the more recent relations between Italy and Czechoslovakia while emphasizing the increased presence of composers from the “young Italian school” (Malipiero, Casella, Pizzetti, Castelnuovo-Tedesco) who were invited to Prague on the occasion of the festival of the International Society for New Music from May 31 to June 2, 1924. He also mentions the tour of the Česká filharmonie with conductor Václav Talich and

34 “L’Istituto di Cultura Italiana a Praga,” *L’Europa orientale* 4, no. 1 (1924): 37: “con lo scopo di diffondere e approfondire la conoscenza della cultura italiana in Cecoslovacchia e di organizzare reciproci rapporti intellettuali e artistici fra i due Paesi con tutti i mezzi adatti a tale fine [...]”

35 Santoro, *L’Italia e l’Europa orientale*, 84–85. See also “Documenti. Pacte de collaboration cordiale entre le Royaume d’Italie et la République Tchécoslovaque,” *L’Europa orientale* 4, no. 8–11 (1924): 589.

36 See Jan Löwenbach, “I rapporti musicali italo-cechi,” in *ibid.*, 515–525.

37 *Ibid.*, 522–523.

the Ševčík Quartet to Italy in 1922, which strengthened mutual relations in the field of music, expressing his wish that Italy would bestow more attention on contemporary Czech music.³⁸

The rise of fascism ultimately only reinforced this political line of cultural propaganda, especially in the early 1930s, when containing German expansion to the east seemed the only strategy for maintaining the balance in Central and Eastern Europe. And yet 1934 was a decisive year for Mussolini's foreign policy. After the invasion of Ethiopia and subsequent sanctions imposed by the League of Nations, Italy was threatened with international isolation. In this context, the Rome Protocols were concluded with Austria and Hungary in an attempt to establish a link with Vienna and Budapest that could be used to contain both German and the Little Entente pressures. At the same time, Italy's position towards Czechoslovakia became problematic as it found itself caught between the need to contain the Germans' advance and the danger of a restoration of the Habsburg Empire. The split between the positions of Rome and Prague on the international stage was accompanied by ongoing ideological polemics between Mussolini's fascism and Masaryk's democratic ideas.³⁹ Exactly for this reason, even more strategic cultural diplomacy was necessary in Czechoslovakia between 1934 and 1935.

In its issue of April 29/May 6, 1934, the magazine *Radiocorriere* announced the program for the third "Grand Opera Season of Radio Broadcasting" ("La grande stagione dell'EIAR," Ente italiano per le audizioni radiofoniche, the Italian Broadcasting Corporation), with no less than fifty-three operas. Of the ten foreign operas by Wagner, De Falla, Massenet, Delibes, Suppé, Mozart, Flotow, and Richard Strauss on the program, *Prodaná nevěsta* naturally stands out, taking place on the fiftieth anniversary of Smetana's death. Program director Giulio Razzi described it as "one of the most beautiful modern comic operas," as can be read in the quote at the beginning of this chapter.⁴⁰

The Italian radio premiere of Smetana was extensively prepared in the Italian press with biographical portraits and informative articles. In the following issue of *Radiocorriere*, Razzi again dedicated an article to Smetana and Dvořák, in which *Prodaná nevěsta* was of course presented not only as Smetana's theatrical masterpiece but also as a masterpiece of Czech music theater and the first opera to be completely rooted in the national heritage.⁴¹ In addition, the music critic Andrea Della Corte published a short but detailed article on Smetana's works in

38 Ibid., 524–525.

39 Caccamo, "Un'occasione mancata," 122–124. See also Francesco Caccamo, "L'Italia nella corrispondenza tra Masaryk e Beneš all'indomani della prima guerra mondiale," *Clio* 3 (1996): 489–513.

40 Razzi, "La grande stagione lirica dell'EIAR," 9, 12.

41 Giulio Razzi, "Dvorak e Smetana," *Radiocorriere* 10, no. 19 (May 6–13, 1934): 12.

the newspaper *La Stampa*, in which he emphasized that *Prodaná nevěsta* was not only one of the most amusing operas of comic theater but also offered the right combination of “folklore” in melody and rhythm and “art music” in its mastery of orchestration.⁴²

Some articles also made specific reference to Smetana as a political, ideological, and national symbol of the Czech Republic, recalling the historical topicality of the precarious geopolitical situation in Central Europe. The critic who published under the pseudonym “Ellemme” emphasized that Smetana’s musical activity took place at a time in which “striving for political independence was strongest in the minds of his fellow citizens, suppressed but not weakened by Austrian domination,” and that revolutionary aspirations had prompted the composer to “interpret the essence of his people, especially the people of the Bohemian countryside, who were not contaminated by German cultural infiltration but, through centuries of national suffering and misfortune, strengthened in their belief in a better future.”⁴³ In this sense, *Prodaná nevěsta* became the musical embodiment of the national characteristics and simplicity of “the people” in the Italian imagination, serving to reinforce the basic principles of fascist ideology.

The opera was broadcast live on November 5, 1934 at 8:45 PM in a newly prepared translation by the conductor Franco Ghione and repeated on November 8. The front page of the November 25/December 1 issue of *Radiocorriere* reads: “Worldwide recognition.”⁴⁴ Remarkable here is the change in perspective: Rather than discussing the performance as such, the article emphasized the reception of the opera broadcast in Czechoslovakia and by Czech personalities, stylizing the artistic event as a manifestation of the bond between the two countries. The article begins, “The broadcast of Smetana’s *Prodaná nevěsta* was received with great acclaim in Czechoslovakia.” It then lists all the letters of praise and enthusiasm that the EIAR General Directorate had received, including from several Czechoslovak radio amateurs, František Chvalkovský (the Czech ambassador to Rome at the time), the secretary of the Umělecká beseda (the prominent Czech artists’ forum in Prague), and a collective letter penned by journalists of the Prague press.

In other words, the fascist regime initially used one of its most powerful technological and propaganda tools not only to reach the Italian people, but to

42 Andrea Della Corte, “Federico Smetana,” *La Stampa* (May 12, 1834): 6.

43 Ellemme [pseud.], “*La sposa venduta di Smetana*,” *La Stampa della sera* (November 8, 1934): 1: “La sua attività di compositore lo Smetana la svolse particolarmente intensa nel periodo 1844–84 in cui, compresse ma non fiaccate dalla dominazione austriaca, le aspirazioni dell’indipendenza politica fervevano maggiormente negli animi dei sudi concittadini. [...] Il musicista sentiva in sé la schietta natura del suo popolo, specialmente del popolo delle campagne boeme, non inquinato dalle infiltrazioni culturali tedesche, ma fortificatosi, attraverso sofferenze e sventure nazionali secolari, nella fede di un migliore avvenire [...]”

44 “Consensi mondiali,” *Radiocorriere* 10, no. 48 (November 25–December 1, 1934): 1.

ensure that the radio broadcast of *Prodaná nevěsta* was perceived as a testimony to cultural and political reciprocity both in Czechoslovakia and, as the title of the article claims, worldwide.⁴⁵ The construction of a rhetoric that increasingly tended to emphasize Smetana's national value and, above all, to mythologize his image as a composer, in fact had a dual purpose: On the one hand, it confirmed the fascist cultural-political ideology of the existence of a distinctly national musical language consisting of references to the folk roots of music, and on the other, it conveyed support for the revolutionary and myth of state founding around Smetana that had taken root in the young Czech Republic.⁴⁶

This notion of an "Italian" mythologization of Smetana became even clearer a few months later, when *Prodaná nevěsta* finally arrived at the "temple" of European music theater following its radio appearance. On February 27, 1935, the opera was performed at Teatro alla Scala in the presence of numerous Italian and Czech journalists as well as the consul Jan Hodek and the Milan authorities. In all the announcements of La Scala's opera season, the occasion of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Smetana's death was linked with the one hundredth anniversary of Ponchielli's birth and the one hundredth anniversary of Bellini's death, in a patent attempt to celebrate the Czech composer and the Italian masters simultaneously: "not only as a dutiful commemoration, but above all as a tribute to the memory of two Italian musicians and a foreigner of great and undeniable value."⁴⁷ Andrea Della Corte portrayed the work as the highest musical expression of anti-Habsburg and anti-German sentiment, emphasizing that Smetana was driven by "forces both native and internal, of patriotism, of nationality, of temperament, and also of culture and the confluence of cultures."⁴⁸ Ultimately,

45 For an overview of radio and fascist propaganda see Franco Monteleone, *La radio italiana nel periodo fascista* (Venice: Marsilio, 1974); and Alberto Monticone, *Il fascismo al microfono. Radio e politica in Italia, 1924–1945* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1978).

46 For a general discussion on music during fascism see Fiamma Nicolodi, *Musica e musicisti nel ventennio fascista* (Fiesole: Discanto, 1984); Harvey Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987). On the construction of the Smetana "myth," see in particular Brian S. Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague: Polemics and Practice at the National Theater, 1900–1938* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2006); Kelly St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana: Myth, Music, and Propaganda* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2017).

47 "Cronache scaligere," *Corriere della sera* (December 7, 1934): 6: "[...] non solo per dovere commemorativo, ma soprattutto per rendere omaggio alla memoria di due musicisti italiani e di uno straniero di alto e indiscutibile valore [...]."

48 Andrea Della Corte, "La fidanzata venduta di Smetana," *La Stampa* (November 3, 1934): 6: "[...] altre forze avevano segretamente acceso il suo pensiero, e guidato la sua mano, forze interne e native, di patriottismo, di nazionalità, di temperamento e anche di cultura e di confluenza di culture. Oppresso dalla dominazione austriaca, il boemo tentava accortamente un'affermazione di libertà. Svincolato dall'intedeschimento, dava rievocazione all'ancora intatto folclore [...]."

the young Franco Abbiati, later author of the monumental four-volume study on Giuseppe Verdi, definitively shaped the image of Smetana and his significance in music history by comparing the Czech composer with the two great opera composers of the nineteenth century: Verdi and Wagner.⁴⁹

In Czechoslovakia, too, there was great enthusiasm and anticipation for this event, which inaugurated *La sposa venduta* on La Scala's stage. The Prague correspondent of the daily newspaper *Corriere della sera* informed Italian readers that the Czechoslovak state railroads had organized a special train for those wishing to attend the opera performance,⁵⁰ while the *Prager Presse* proclaimed, "The public sphere has with satisfaction acknowledged the gesture of Italian radio, which offered to broadcast the opera to Czech radio on Smetana's birthday."⁵¹ Last but not least, the illustrated supplement of the same newspaper reported on the front page on March 17, 1935, alongside photos of scenes and actors (figure 17):

Smetana's everlasting, youthful opera *Prodaná nevěsta* was also a resounding success at La Scala in Milan. Under the baton of Franco Ghione, with Augusta Oltrabella as Mařenka, Alessandro Vesselovski as Jeník, Tancredi Pasero as Kecál and Giuseppe Nessi as Vašek, this opera was staged in Europe's most famous opera house to enthusiastic cheers from the audience. This enthusiasm was echoed by Italian critics, who recognized in Smetana's music the strongest expression of Czech character, but also a peak achievement in music history. On its triumphal march through the world, *Prodaná nevěsta* has now also conquered Italy.⁵²

49 Franco Abbiati, "Federico Smetana e il teatro cecoslovacco," *Corriere della sera* (February 16, 1935): 5.

50 "La Sposa venduta alla Scala. Vivissimo interesse a Praga," *Corriere della sera* (March 1, 1935): 6.

51 "Die Uebertragung der *Verkauften Braut* aus Mailand," *Prager Presse* (February 28, 1935): 5.

52 "Smetanas *Verkaufte Braut* in der Mailänder Scala," *Die Welt am Sonntag. Bilderbeilage der 'Prager Presse'* (March 17, 1935): 1: "Smetanas unvergänglich-jugendfrischer Oper *Die Verkaufte Braut* auch in der Mailänder Scala ein durchschlagender Erfolg beschieden war. Unter Franco Ghiones Leitung mit Augusta Oltrabella als Mařenka, Alessandro Vesselovski als Jeník, Tancredi Pasero als Kecál und Giuseppe Nessi als Vašek ging diese Oper im berühmtesten Opernhaus Europas unter begeistertem Jubel des Publikums in Szene. Dieser Begeisterung schloss sich auch die italienische Kritik an, die in Smetanas Musik den stärksten Ausdruck tschechischen Wesens, aber auch eine Gipfelleistung der Musikgeschichte anerkennt. Auf ihrem Siegeszug durch die Welt hat *Die verkaufte Braut* nun auch Italien erobert."



Figure 17: Front page of the illustrated *Prager Presse* supplement (March 17, 1935)

In the spirit of cultural exchange between the two nations, celebrations were organized in Prague to mark the one hundredth anniversary of Bellini's death

under the patronage of the Minister of Education and National Enlightenment Jan Krčmář, the Italian Ambassador to Prague, Guido Rocco, and the Mayor of Prague, Karel Baxa, culminating in a performance of *Norma* on February 9, 1935, under Bernardino Molinari. Less than three months later, it was Franco Ghione again who conducted *Prodaná nevěsta* (May 17, 1935) and *Aida* (May 23, 1935) at the National Theatre in Prague.⁵³

This enthusiasm and the rapprochement between Italy and Czechoslovakia cooled when Italy accepted the Anschluss in 1938 and the fascist regime made a pact with National Socialism. *Prodaná nevěsta* would not return to the stage of La Scala until 1959, under completely different political circumstances.⁵⁴

The stages of *Prodaná nevěsta*'s reception in Italy reveal the emergence of various nationalist discourses that intersect with political and social events on both local and European levels. On the one hand, Italians were concerned at the beginning of the twentieth century about the survival of the primacy of Italian opera and feared losing cultural primacy in the musical field. On the other hand, *Prodaná nevěsta* embodies the central importance of opera as a powerful means of cultural diplomacy, capable of conveying political messages, appealing to and manipulating public opinion. In the case of Czechoslovakia, Italy's attempt to assert itself as the dominant power in Eastern and Central Europe in political, economic, and cultural terms is an additional factor.

The study of the dissemination of Smetana's operas, at least in the first half of the twentieth century, nevertheless raises new questions. It seems noteworthy that the Italian performance of Smetana's opera in 1934 took place six years after the 1928 gala premiere in Paris. As Christopher Campo-Bowen has shown, the event was planned by both the French and Czechoslovakian sides as a clear demonstration of proximity and, above all, as a clear signal of the political alliance with the other European powers.⁵⁵ The documents analyzed show that Italian cultural diplomacy and the performances of Smetana's opera, first on the radio, then at La Scala, and finally at the National Theatre in Prague with

53 See in particular the interview with Ghione, "Bei Franco Ghione," *Prager Presse* (May 15, 1935): 4.

54 The opera was staged on February 2, 4, 7, 11 and 15, 1959 under the direction of Lovro von Matačić and with Rolando Panerai (Krušina), Fiorenza Cossotto (Ludmila), Cesy Brogginini (Mařenka), Giuseppe Di Stefano (Jeník), Piero De Palma (Vašek), Andrea Mongelli (Kecal). See the website of the Teatro alla Scala archive https://www.teatroallascala.org/it/archivio/spettacolo.html?guid_=d4ef0fd2-5e6d-4f28-886b-87f05de12076&id_allest_=2989&id_allest_conc_=&id_evento_=7259&mode=EVENTI (accessed September 30, 2023).

55 Campo-Bowen, "An Operatic Locarno."

guest conductor Ghione, could also have been a reaction to this Franco-Czech political move.

In this sense, *Prodaná nevěsta* proves to be a paradigmatic example, demonstrating the necessity not only of an interdisciplinary but above all a transnational and trans-European approach to cultural diplomacy, which effectively unfolded on the unstable European chessboard between the two world wars.

Translated from the German by Rebecca Schmid.

Revising Smetana, Restoring Smetana: Václav Juda Novotný and the Performance History of *Dvě vdovy* (*The Two Widows*)

Just an excellent doctor does not shrink back in horror when it is necessary to cut into a body's diseased bowels with his operating knife, or even to replace certain portions of an organism with other, healthier ones, so too did our intrepid arranger steel himself for the most extreme measures.¹

Such graphic language is typically not found in opera reviews, yet that is precisely what František Hejda published in 1893 in the Prague music journal *Dalibor*. Hejda was reviewing a new production of Bedřich Smetana's opera *Dvě vdovy* (*The Two Widows*, 1874, rev. 1878); the "intrepid arranger" in question was the translator, composer, and writer Václav Juda Novotný. The measures Novotný took in rearranging Smetana's 1874 opera for this new production were indeed extreme. He eliminated many recitatives and replaced them with dialogue, he rewrote large portions of the libretto, and, most significantly, he changed the position of all but one of the opera's musical numbers, going so far as to create an entirely new, independent middle act. This turned what had been a two-act opera linked by recitative into a three-act work with a mixture of recitative and spoken dialogue.

Novotný's motivations for undertaking this extensive revision were decidedly complex. They reveal much not only about Novotný, but also about operatic life in *fin-de-siècle* Prague and cultural elites' efforts toward gaining broader European audiences. The story of Novotný's *Dvě vdovy* is in part a story of the village mode—what I define as a way of understanding Czech subjectivity and identity through idealized representations of rural life, especially on operatic stages. The

1 František Hejda, "Národní divadlo v Praze. *Dvě vdovy*," *Dalibor* 15, no. 25–26 (April 22, 1893): 195: "Jako výborný lékař nehrozí se v případě nutnosti zarýti do chorých útrob těla svým operačním nožem, ba nahradit i jisté částky organismu jinými, zdravými, tak odhodlal se i náš neohrožený upravovatel ku prostředkům nejkrajnějším." This chapter grew out of research and writing that formed part of my dissertation; see Christopher Campo-Bowen, "'We Shall Remain Faithful': The Village Mode in Czech Opera, 1866–1928," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018).

village mode was especially resonant in the wake of the Prague National Theater's (Národní divadlo) successful 1892 residency in Vienna during the International Exhibition of Music and Theater. Additionally, investigating Novotný's unusually intrusive revisions and their reception history also provides new insight into the wider European process of composer glorification and canonization.

Novotný's revisions were not unusual in and of themselves—figures such as Henry Rowley Bishop in London and Alphonse Royer and Gustave Vaëz in Paris had translated and adapted operas to suit local conditions earlier in the nineteenth century.² What makes this case study unique is that, unlike the metropolitan capitals of London and Paris, Novotný was not attempting to update a foreign opera to make it more marketable in a different setting.³ Instead, by taking a domestic work and updating it for local audiences, Novotný was trying to create a better (and more marketable) Czech opera and, concurrently, a better Czech composer in the figure of Smetana just short of a decade after his death. This adaptation—inextricably intertwined with the ideology of the village mode—was likewise tied to the position of Prague as a regional capital within the Habsburg Empire. Novotný's emphasis on the operatic staging of rural life went hand-in-hand with desires to raise the status of Czech culture within the Austrian imperial hierarchy and in Europe generally, something that could be accomplished, it was imagined, through more and better-quality operatic performances. I argue that Novotný's revisions created a paradox that eventually led to their repudiation: Smetana's less successful operas, in order to serve as ideal artistic symbols, had to be improved, and *Dvě vdovy* had never enjoyed the same audience or critical success as *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) or *Hubička* (*The Kiss*). However, if Smetana's operas could be improved, then he as

2 For a discussion of Bishop's 1819 changes to *Le nozze di Figaro*, for example, see Tim Carter, *Understanding Italian Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 123. More information on Bishop and his activities can be found in Christina Elizabeth Fuhrman, *"Adapted and Arranged for the English Stage": Continental Operas Transformed for the London Theater, 1814–33* (PhD diss., Washington University, 2001). Royer and Vaëz were responsible for, among other activities, assisting Donizetti in adapting *Lucia de Lammermoor* for the Théâtre de la Renaissance in 1840; see Rebecca Harris-Warrick, "Lucia Goes to Paris: A Tale of Three Theaters," in *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 195–277.

3 Novotný was no stranger, however, to translating foreign works into Czech for the National Theater: his translation credits included *Aida*, *Don Giovanni*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Hochzeit des Figaro*, *Otello*, *Tannhäuser*, *The Queen of Spades*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and many other operas. See "Václav Juda Novotný," <http://archiv.narodni-divadlo.cz/default.aspx?jz=cs&dk=Umelec.aspx&ju=2272&sz=0&abc=N&pn=356affcc-f301-3000-85ff-c11223344aaa> (accessed March 11, 2024).

a composer was not infallible—a position that went against growing consensus on Smetana as a mythic artist-hero in the Beethovenian mold.⁴

In this study, I set the scene by briefly outlining the history of *Dvě vdovy* up until 1892. I then trace the events that led to Novotný being commissioned to “fix” *Dvě vdovy* so that it might rise to the same level of audience acclaim as Smetana’s more famous operas, such as *Prodaná nevěsta* and *Hubička*. I continue with an analysis of Novotný’s textual and musical changes to the opera with an eye towards expressions of the village mode and cosmopolitan desires in 1890s Prague. Finally, I examine the afterlife of the production through its final retirement, in 1923, in favor of Smetana’s revised version from 1877–78.⁵

1. The Origins of *Dvě vdovy* and Smetana’s Operatic Legacy

Dvě vdovy has a long history of revisions and productions. The first version from 1874 featured four main characters: the titular widows, Karolina and Anežka, the gamekeeper Mumlal, and Ladislav, the ardent suitor in love with Anežka. Aside from opening and closing choruses, the entirety of the two-act opera was concerned with the interaction of the four main characters and proceeded through a combination of prose dialogue and discrete musical numbers. The plot represents a straightforward love story: Ladislav pines for Anežka, who is still in mourning for her recently deceased husband, and Karolina, happily widowed and successfully governing the estate, contrives to get the two of them together. Karolina’s intrigues eventually succeed while Mumlal provides comic relief throughout the opera.

Dvě vdovy closely follows its original models: nineteenth-century French conversation operas. The musicologist Vlasta Hrušková has proposed Fromental Halévy’s opera *L’Éclair* (1835) and Daniel François Esprit Auber’s *Le Domino noir* (1837) as possible precursors, since both found an appreciative audience on Prague stages.⁶ Early reactions to Smetana’s opera were relatively positive, with the elegance of the salon setting receiving high praise. Through Smetana’s music, the French salon was transformed into a Czech one, with newly nationally-

4 For a discussion of the origins and outlines of this trope, see Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), esp. xiii–xix.

5 A vocal score of Smetana’s second version was published in 1914, but an annotated copy held in the Music Archive of the National Theater in Prague indicates that a production using a copy of that score was still following some of Novotný’s edits and prose. See Bedřich Smetana, *Dvě vdovy. Definitivní Smetanova úprava s recitativy z roku 1877* (Prague: Umělecká beseda, 1914). Printed piano-vocal score, inventory number 6/16, Prague, Archive of the Národní divadlo.

6 See Vlasta Hrušková, *Bedřich Smetana: Dvě vdovy. Dramaturgická analýza opery* (Master’s thesis, Charles University Prague, 1972), 34.

representative aristocrats engaging in the witty intrigues usually attributed to the nobility of other lands.⁷ Reviews coalesced around two specific issues that would haunt later productions of *Dvě vdovy*. The first, typical of the opera reception in the case of a canonized composer (or one quickly becoming canonized), was criticism of the work's libretto, authored by Emanuel Züngel, which critics considered dramatically insufficient to the task of supporting Smetana's music. The second was critics' praise for the Czech character of that very music, though specific examples of what represented such character were lacking. It was precisely these two ideas—Smetana's exemplary Czech music and Züngel's substandard libretto—that, taken to an extreme, provided the justification for Novotný's later surgery. Despite the overall positive reviews, the opera was only performed seven times in 1874 before disappearing from the repertoire.

Perhaps with an eye towards securing further performances of *Dvě vdovy*, Smetana and Züngel undertook significant revisions to the opera in 1877. These revisions included new recitatives in place of all the spoken dialogue, a new conclusion for act 1, and a brand new aria for Ladislav at that opened act 2. The same act now also featured a pair of additional peasant characters, the young lovers Toník and Lidunka. Smetana himself was explicit about his aims in composing this new music. He emphasized the Czech character of the revisions in a letter to Züngel, characterizing Ladislav's song as written in a fully national style—he even went so far as to state that “I myself can confirm that it is a new folk song.”⁸

Smetana also described the new finale of act 1 and an additional trio for Toník, Lidunka, and Mumlal as composed “in the national style.”⁹ The explicit connection of the national to the lower-class, rural characters in Smetana's new version was a clear instance of the village mode being applied to an opera otherwise focused on aristocratic intrigues. In an earlier letter to Procházka from 1880, Smetana discussed the updated character of the revised opera, but this time in a way that would foreshadow Novotný's rationale for revising *Dvě vdovy*. Smetana reported on a recent performance of his salon opera:

Dvě vdovy, which was again repeated several days ago with decided success, gave me an idea: would this opera not be the most suitable for

7 The concept of a specifically Czech nobility was, moreover, rather complicated and somewhat invented; see discussion below.

8 “[...] sám mohu tvrditi, že jest to nová národní píseň.” See Lev Zelenka-Lerando, *B. Smetana a E. Züngl. Listy B. Smetany E. Zünglovi* (Prague: Nákladem L. Zelenky-Lerando, 1903), 8 (emphasis in original). The term “národní píseň” can be translated literally as “national song,” but a more idiomatic translation would probably be “folk song,” as this aligns with the German translation, “Volkslieder.”

9 “[...] v národním slohu [...]” See Zelenka-Lerando, *B. Smetana a E. Züngl*, 8; and Pražák, *Smetanovy zpěvohry*, vol. 3 (Prague: Za svobodu, 1948), 46–47.

introduction to foreign lands, namely on German stages? [...] In its new version the opera projects both a national and cosmopolitan character, and as you know, does so in a kind of salon tone.¹⁰

Smetana's emphasis here on cosmopolitanism and attracting foreign attention to his operas mirrored the attitude of National Theater administrators and Novotný in the early 1890s. While Novotný may have disagreed with Smetana about the suitability of the opera for both domestic and foreign consumption, due to what he considered a difficult libretto, both composer and reviser shared a view that looked eagerly outward to the rest of Europe while also maintaining a sense of Czech particularity.

Smetana's additions garnered praise from critics when the new version was produced on March 15, 1878, but they did little to further endear the work as a whole to Czech audiences. Despite reports that several numbers from the revised version of *Dvě vdovy* had to be repeated at the premiere, there were only seventeen total performances of the opera between 1878 and 1885; by contrast, *Prodaná nevěsta* enjoyed seventy-five performances during that same period. A third version of *Dvě vdovy*, crafted by the German-language theater in Hamburg without Smetana's blessing, was premiered once more to critical, if not box-office, success on December 28, 1881. While the musical and dramatic changes made in Hamburg had no immediate effect on the content of the opera as it was performed in Prague, it was the first performance of any Smetana opera (albeit in a heavily revised version) in a German theater.¹¹

While *Dvě vdovy* technically became the first Smetana opera to have a premiere on a German stage, it was *Prodaná nevěsta*, staged on June 1, 1892, at the International Exhibition of Music and Theater in Vienna, that captured the attention of both the empire and the wider Western world. The triumph in Vienna also caused shifts in the cultural landscape of Prague. Overnight, Smetana's newly international cachet led to a revision of the priorities and goals of key figures in Prague's musical life, including Novotný and the director of the National Theater, František Adolf Šubert. The village milieu performed in *Prodaná nevěsta* had suddenly become one of the primary ways in which Czech music was legible in Vienna, and the opera's success there served both

10 "Dvě vdovy, které se před několika dny zase opakovaly, a sice rozhodným úspěchem, mě daly myšlenku, jest-li by tato opera nebyla nejvhodnější k uvedení na cizinu a sice německém jevišti? [...] V novém přepracování má opera tato obojí ráz, národní a kosmopolitický, a tento docela jak Vám známo, v jakémsi salonním tonu." See Jan Löwenbach, *B. Smetana a Dr. Ludevít Procházka. Vzájemná korespondence* (Prague: Umělecká beseda, 1914), 37.

11 For more on the Hamburg revisions to *Dvě vdovy*, see František Bartoš's introduction in Bedřich Smetana, *Dvě vdovy* (Studijní vydání děl Bedřicha Smetany, 7), ed. František Bartoš (Prague: Orbis, 1950), IX–XIII.

to reinscribe this positioning of Czech music and to expand the boundaries of its legibility. Consequently, to gain wider acceptance of and visibility for Czech opera, one had to perform the village, whether implicitly or explicitly. In this sense, the newfound enthusiasm for the village mode represented an internalization of imperial ideas: Czechs artists and critics were encouraged to stereotype or auto-essentialize themselves as a means of producing an identity legible outside the borders of Bohemia.

Smetana's newfound popularity both abroad and at home likely led Šubert and/or the National Theater Association to reconsider their approach to staging the composer's operas. None of the composer's operas were as popular as *Prodaná nevěsta*, however. With public interest in Smetana and his operas suddenly on the rise, someone in the National Theater's orbit probably thought that it would be worth revisiting their old productions as they sought to capitalize on the post-Vienna Smetana wave; plans were in the works by August for visits to Paris and the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, though neither of these would come to pass.¹² During the heady days of summer 1892, either Šubert or someone of a similar position contacted Novotný with a request for changes, or Novotný himself decided such alterations were necessary. What we know with certainty is that Novotný had completed his drastic revisions to *Dvě vdovy* by September 1, 1892, the date given at the end of his preface to the published libretto of the new version. In that preface, he states that the "management of the National Theater" had "entrusted" to him the task of revising *Dvě vdovy*, though Novotný gave no explicit clues as to the management's motivation for the request.¹³

We can, however, glean something of those matters from later documents. At a general meeting of the National Theater Association's membership on October 30, 1892, according to a report published in *Národní politika*, the playwright František Ruth suggested that the upcoming National Theater season be delayed so as to allow for the addition of a cycle of "at least" five Smetana operas.¹⁴

12 See the minutes of the National Theater executive committee from August 18, 1892, *Protokoly Správního výboru Družstva Národního divadla*, Prague, Národní archiv, sig. D50, fond ND.

13 Václav Juda Novotný, *Dvě vdovy, komická zpěvohra o třech jednáních* (Prague: Nakladatel Fr. A. Urbánek, 1893), 8: "[...] když mi správa Národního divadla svěřila novou úpravu 'Dvou vdov.'" The minutes of the executive committee do not reveal who approached whom, but they do note that Novotný was paid an honorarium of 250 gulden for his efforts. For comparison, leading soloists at the National Theater at this time generally made anywhere from 3,000 to 4,000 gulden for a single season. See minutes from September 15, 1892, in *Protokoly Správního výboru Družstva Národního divadla*, Prague, Národní archiv, sig. D50, fond ND.

14 See "Řádná valná hromada družstva Národního divadla," *Národní politika* 10, no. 301 (October 31, 1892): 1. An obituary for Ruth provides some insight into his activities; see "František Ruth," *Divadlo: Rozhledy po světě divadelním* 1, no. 7 (September 1, 1903): 142–143.

Šubert was present at this meeting, and while the record does not show what he thought of this proposal (or whether he had already had a similar idea), a later publication adds some clarity.

Every year during his tenure as director of the National Theater, Šubert published a pamphlet in which he summarized the activities of the theater for the recently concluded season. His introduction to the pamphlet for the tenth year of the National Theater, published in 1893, paid homage to Smetana in no uncertain terms and described audiences' new attitude towards Smetana: "What was earlier still felt somewhat as a responsibility, indeed as a certain sacrifice—was transformed into entertainment: our entire world joyfully goes on a pilgrimage to the banks of the Vltava whenever Smetana's operas are given [...]"¹⁵ This change in audience opinion intimated a larger social transformation. The broadening acceptance of Smetana's operas meant that they could be instrumentalized more and more as markers of national essence, which in turn reinforced the concurrent, growing need to perform national belonging through public participation in cultural events such as opera. While Šubert was likely trying to paint a rosy picture for his readers, such an assessment of the changed attitude toward Smetana's operas would not have appeared *ex nihilo*.

Šubert in turn cited the triumphs of Vienna as the reason for the success of the new cycle. He stated that the idea of a Smetana cycle had already been floated several years earlier, but that it did not happen because of unspecified unfavorable circumstances. The idea for a cycle, moreover, "was not formulated then as it was now, after Czech art and especially Smetana's operas attained victory in Vienna. That is why the idea was rightly dropped then—and why the cycle was rightly performed now. What theater and audience would once, to a certain extent, have had to force themselves to do, now became self-evidently necessary, and, as already stated, was universally successful."¹⁶ The cycle, moreover, was a marker of the National Theater's high cultural aspirations. By staging complete performances of all of Smetana's operas, Šubert and the National Theater Association were attempting to grant Smetana the same status that, for example, Wagner and the complete cycles of his works at Bayreuth held in Germany.

15 František Šubert, *Desátý rok Národního divadla* (Prague: Družstvo Národního divadla, 1893), 4: "Co dříve stále ještě poněkud se pocítovalo jako povinnost, ba jako jistá oběť – to změnilo se v zábavu: celý náš svět radostně putuje ku břehu Vltavy, kdykoliv se dávají opery Smetanovy [...]"

16 Ibid.: "[...] nepodávala se sama tak, jak bylo nyní po docíleném vítězství českého umění a zvláště oper Smetanových ve Vídni. Proto bylo druhdy právem od ní upuštěno—a proto byla nyní právem provedena. K čemu by se bývalo druhdy divadlo i obecnstvo opět do jisté míry nutilo, to stalo se nyní samo nutným a, jak praveno, zdařilo se všestranně."

2. The Intrepid Doctor's Extreme Measures: Novotný's Revisions

Not the least of the concrete markers of Viennese success were Novotný's remarkably extensive revisions to *Dvě vdovy*. The vast majority of his changes to the opera concerned the structure of the libretto; only once did he interfere, quite lightly, with musical material aside from moving it to different locations. Indeed, in his introduction to the new version of the libretto, Novotný referred continually to the beauty and sanctity of Smetana's music while simultaneously criticizing the libretto on multiple fronts. He pointed out a number of elements that, according to him, interrupted the flow of the action, including the added recitatives from 1878, the multiple entrances and exits of Mumlal and Ladislav in the first act, and the addition of the "rustic pair" of Toník and Lidunka, among others. All these "disruptive elements" in the libretto, he stated, were the reason for the opera's failure "despite all its extraordinary musical beauty; for the profusion of beautiful material cannot make an impression if it does not appear in beautiful, logically unfolding forms."¹⁷

Not only did Novotný extensively rework the libretto, but he also kept only a single number—Karolina's introductory aria, "Samostatně vládnú já"—in the same location as in the original libretto. All the other numbers were reordered to suit his new vision of the opera's dramatic unfolding, shown in table 8.

Table 8: Side-by-side Comparison of Libretti

Züngel (1878)	Novotný (1893)
Act 1	
1. Chorus: "Jitro krásné, nebe jasné"	3. Trio: "Dobré jitro, milostivá paní" (Karolina, Anežka, Mumlal)
2. Recit, Aria: "Samostatně vládnú já" (Karolina)	2. Recit, Aria: "Samostatně vládnú já" (Karolina)
3. Trio: "Dobré jitro, milostivá paní" (Karolina, Anežka, Mumlal)	Dialogue
4. Duet: "Dlouho-li zde budu bloudit" (Mumlal, Ladislav)	Dialogue
5. Recit	6. Quartet: "Ó, jakou tíseň... Malá ty šelmičko" (Karolina, Anežka, Mumlal, Ladislav)

17 Novotný, *Dvě vdovy*, 7: "[...] rušivých živlů. Proto ten neúspěch při vši neobyčejné kráse hudební; neboť hojnost krásné látky nedělá dojem, nejeví-li se v krásných, logicky se rozvíjejících formách."

6. Quartet: “Ó, jakou tíseň... Malá ty šelmičko” (Karolina, Anežka, Mumlal, Ladislav)	9. Recit, Duet: “Rozhodnuto, uzavřeno” (Karolina, Anežka)
7. Chorus: “Mumlale, aj, tu vás máme”	Dialogue
	10. Recit, Duet: “Ach, jak kruté souží” (Anežka, Ladislav)
	11. Recit: “Stůjte, pane!” (Karolina, Anežka, Ladislav)
	12. Recit, Aria: “Aj, jaký to krásný den” (Anežka)
Act 2	
8. Aria: “Když zavítá máj” (Ladislav)	Dialogue
9. Recit, Duet: “Rozhodnuto, uzavřeno” (Karolina, Anežka)	14. Trio: “Co to, holka, co to” (Toník, Lidunka, Mumlal)
10. Recit, Duet: “Ach, jak kruté souží” (Anežka, Ladislav)	1. Chorus: “Jitro krásné, nebe jasné”
11. Recit: “Stůjte, pane!” (Karolina, Anežka, Ladislav)	Dialogue
12. Recit, Aria: “Aj, jaký to krásný den” (Anežka)	7. Chorus: “Mumlale, aj, tu vás máme”
13. Recit, Aria: “Nechť cokoliv mne zlobí” (Mumlal)	Dialogue and Dance (<i>zakolanská</i>)
14. Trio: “Co to, holka, co to” (Toník, Lidunka, Mumlal)	17. Chorus: “Musí nás mít Pán Bůh rád” [retexted]
15. Recit	
16. Recit, Quartet: “Jaké to, ach, překvapení” (Karolina, Anežka, Mumlal, Ladislav)	
17. Chorus: “Musí nás mít Pán Bůh rád”	
Act 3	
	8. Aria: “Když zavítá máj” (Ladislav)
	13. Recit, Aria: “Nechť cokoliv mne zlobí” (Mumlal)
	Dialogue

	15. Recit
	16. Recit, Quartet: “Jaké to, ach, překvapení” (Karolina, Anežka, Mumlal, Ladislav)
	6. Quartet: “Ó, jakou tíseň... Malá ty šelmičko” (Karolina, Anežka, Mumlal, Ladislav) [Reprise]

Novotný’s most drastic interventions in the libretto were intimately linked to the new power and cultural cachet of idealized rural life. He eliminated a sizable proportion of the recitatives and replaced them with dialogue. The motivation here was twofold: one, he considered the 1878 recitatives to be leaden and plodding, hampering more than they helped.¹⁸ Two, the decision to revert to spoken dialogue was not unlike that of Henry Bishop in his 1819 English-language *Marriage of Figaro* adaptation for London, in that dialogue was in part employed to make the work more audience-friendly.¹⁹ As was the case with Bishop’s revisions to Mozart in London, Novotný was, to an extent, working against perceptions of Smetana’s music being too difficult or obscure for audiences. In distinction from the earlier example, however, it appears that Novotný wanted to draw contrasts between the class of the characters in a way that reinforced stereotypes of idealized ruralness. For the aristocratic characters—Karolina, Anežka, and Ladislav—Novotný kept all the through-composed recitatives that characterize their interactions, creating a mix of spoken dialogue and recitative. Accompanied recitatives in particular were a feature of operatic depictions of nobility, with a tradition going back centuries.²⁰ However, for interactions between the aristocrats and lower-class characters, and among the lower-class characters themselves—Mumlal, Toník, and Lidunka—Novotný reverted to spoken dialogue in a manner reminiscent of *opéra comique* or *Singspiel*.

This was particularly important for Mumlal, whom Novotný described as a “dobrák od kosti” (literally translates as “a good one from the bone”).²¹ Novotný also regarded his new Mumlal, now characterized overwhelmingly through prose dialogues and monologues, as a vehicle for an excellent actor. This emphasis on

18 Ibid., 6.

19 See Fuhrman, “Adapted and Arranged for the English Stage,” 138–142.

20 For more on the dramaturgical role of recitative versus spoken dialogue, see Laurel E. Zeiss, “The Dramaturgy of Opera,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 179–201: 185–188; a discussion of operatic poetics, subjects, and genre conventions across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be found in Alessandra Campana, “Genre and Poetics,” in *ibid.*, 202–224: 208–214.

21 See Novotný, *Dvě vdovy*, 10.

comedic acting also marked his difference from the nobles. In the opening scene of Novotný's new version, Karolina makes a reference to Ugolino, a figure from Dante's *Inferno*, who was also present in Züngel's original libretto. In the original, Mumlal merely remarks that he does not know this Ugolino:

Züngel (1878)

Mumlal: Everything in my preserve looks beautiful—I cultivate game like wine—

Karolina: Perhaps to eat them like Ugolino—

Mumlal: I don't know him—

However, in Novotný's version, Mumlal's ignorance is emphasized and tied to specificities of place:

Novotný (1893)

Mumlal: Everything in my preserve looks beautiful. I cultivate game like wines [...]

Karolina: Perhaps to eat them, in the way of Ugolino ("pravzor Ugolina") [...]

Mumlal: I don't eat in Kolín! ("u Kolína") [...]

The pun on the name of Kolín would likely have been comprehensible to audiences even if they, too, could not place the reference to Dante. In Novotný's version, not only does Mumlal not get the reference, but he also does not even recognize it as a person's name, instead thinking it a countryside town. Such a passage not only emphasizes Mumlal's simplemindedness, but also demonstrates a specifically Czech identity, as only someone from Bohemia would likely know the town of Kolín. It is precisely through gestures like these that the village mode could encode multiple meanings about social categories—in this case, class—within a larger framework of nationalist self-imagining.

Besides the removal of most of *Dvě vdovy*'s recitatives, the other of Novotný's drastic changes in revising the libretto, and surely the more extreme, was the creation of an entirely new second act in order to showcase an idealized Czech rural life—to quite literally stage the village. This new act included the opening and closing choruses of the first act, the trio featuring Toník, Lidunka, and Mumlal, and the final chorus and ballet that close the original second act. Novotný explained his reasons for this radical change:

The rural dancehall with its harvest festival merriment is, in the newly inserted second act, the true soil of these happy scenes of national life. Earlier they sadly languished as inserts in different locations. Here in a

folk environment, however, they have their natural place and operate, in all their beauty and strength, in this unified current of national music.²²

Simply having village-mode elements in the opera was not enough for Novotný—they all had to be concentrated in one place to intensify their effect. As with the staging of the National Theater's Vienna production of *Prodaná nevěsta*, Novotný specified supernumerary roles that pantomimed village life throughout the second act, further contributing to the air of verisimilitude. These figures included the mayor, blacksmith, teacher, and “other members of the countryside delegation.”²³ In rearranging and updating the opera to serve newly relevant Czech and imperial tastes for village pageantry, Novotný was adapting a long-established tradition of operatic practice for his local context; in Paris, Royer and Vaěz had significantly altered the plot, setting, and conclusion of *Lucia di Lammermoor* to conform to what they termed specifically French dramatic conventions.²⁴

Finally, this same impulse led to Novotný's single interference with Smetana's musical material: his addition of a new dance number, the *zakolanská*, to the plot of the opera. According to Züngel's original libretto, the *zakolanská* was a dance in which the partners gave each other a kiss in the course of dancing; Karolina and Ladislav danced it offstage during act 2, which Mumlal duly reported to Anežka, making her jealous.²⁵ Novotný staged the *zakolanská* for two reasons: one, it clarified some of the motivations in the larger plot by showing the audience the action instead of telling them about it, and two, it provided further opportunities for dancing, which was an important part of projecting ruralness in the new second act. The music for the *zakolanská* originally underpinned a recitative that Novotný considered superfluous and cut. From the excised material he extracted forty-seven bars of music in D major, marked in the 1893 manuscript prompter's score as “Molto moderato a [*sic*] la Valser.”

The musical changes here are quite minor: they included adding embellishments to the right-hand melody and expanding some octave doublings in the left hand, probably to help the music stand alone as a dance piece rather than as underpinning for recitative. A manuscript full score copied in 1884,

22 Ibid., 9–10: “Venkovská tančírna s obžínkovým veselím jest v nově vsutém druhém jednání pravou půdou veselých těch scen z národního života, které dříve jako vložky na různých místech smutně živořily, kdežto zde v ovzduší lidovém mají své přirozené místo a působí v celé své kráse i síle v jednotném tom proudu hudby národní.”

23 Ibid., 57: “[...] jiní členové venkovské honorace.”

24 See Harris-Warrick, “*Lucia* Goes to Paris,” 205–206.

25 Toník also refers to the dance in his trio with Lidunka and Mumlal (no. 14) as a way to get a kiss from his fiancée. In Novotný's new ordering of the libretto, this happens before Mumlal reports to Anežka that Karolina and Ladislav danced the *zakolanská* (no. 13), further clarifying the characters' motivations.

moreover, bears markings indicating that it was used in the performance of Novotný's version with full orchestra, and no emendations have been made to the orchestral texture of the *zakolanská* in that version. This suggests that there may have been no actual changes to the music of the *zakolanská* in the course of performances of Novotný's version of *Dvě vdovy*, and if there were, they were minor enough not to require modification of the conductor's score.

In a way, this lack of any significant changes to Smetana's musical material testified both to Novotný's desire to intensify the village mode in his new revision and to Smetana's status as a national composer. Novotný needed music for a new dance to fill out his new second act, which presented a rural dancehall in a "unified current of national music," so he expediently shifted musical material around to achieve this with little regard for the actual character of the music. The passage Novotný made use of, however, had no specifically Czech associations or markings in its original incarnation: he did not, for example, borrow music from a different Smetana opera or orchestrate a piano version of a nationally marked dance like a *skočná* or polka, which was a common practice for operatic adaptations elsewhere.²⁶ Novotný's use of a relatively unremarkable passage from within *Dvě vdovy* indicated that, in his eyes at least, Smetana's music was sufficiently "national" to reasonably support villagers during a folk dance, even when taken from a recitative featuring aristocratic characters. Moreover, because there was "so much" in the score, he did not need to go beyond its confines in search of other music to fill out his new conception of the opera. This suggests a strangely dissonant view of the score as work-concept: while the borders of the score itself were inviolable, the interior arrangement of the numbers and the connective tissue between them were open to drastic modification. Such a disconnect would give reviewers, if not audiences, pause.

3. Practicality versus Sacralization: The Reception of Novotný's version of *Dvě vdovy*

While all the reviews of Novotný's new version of *Dvě vdovy* at least touched on the drastic nature of his revisions, many critics regarded the changes as positive or even necessary. The composer and critic Emanuel Chvála applauded Novotný's solution and credited him with appropriate piety toward "the master's immeasurably valuable score, the artistic requirements of which he considered

26 For example, in adapting Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for the Parisian Académie Royale in 1834, Louis Véron interpolated numbers from *Così fan tutte*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Idomeneo*, and even the *Requiem* to help conform to the ubiquitous five-act structure of contemporary French grand opera. See Katharine Ellis, "Rewriting *Don Giovanni*, or 'The Thieving Magpies,'" *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 119, no. 2 (1994): 212–250.

wholly inviolable.”²⁷ For Chvála, the necessity of the revisions was due to the incompatibility of the French source text with the explicitly Czech village elements. According to him, the village scenes had been forced into the plot of the original, which led to irregularities and problems in Smetana’s two versions.²⁸ Instead, Novotný’s revision achieved two important improvements. First, the “musically excellent village scenes” were now integrated into the larger plot, and second, their consolidation in the new second act justified their role within the opera.²⁹ Behind these words we can distinguish an important motivation: Chvála considered it to be of the utmost importance that these scenes were preserved and made to work with the larger plot rather than removing them entirely, for their music and village character were highly valuable in his eyes. Moreover, such village scenes would undoubtedly contribute to the opera’s success and therefore secure its place in the repertoire of the National Theater. Chvála’s argument suggests the relevance and popularity of operatic depictions of village life in the wake of *Prodaná nevěsta*’s triumph in Vienna.

The music critic and pedagogue Karel Knittl wrote a positive review for the journal *Světobzor* in which he likened Novotný to an “experienced surgeon” (“zkušený chirurg”) in his handling of the revisions. More interestingly, however, Knittl made an important distinction about what he considered the intended audience for the new version: although Novotný’s work “was not about saving the life of Smetana’s opera, which through its merit, sweetness, and individuality was kept alive in the hearts of every progress-loving Czech musician, the opera was dead to the greater world, to the wide strata of the audience.”³⁰ Novotný’s changes, Knittl asserted, ensured that now both musicians and non-musicians could appreciate *Dvě vdovy*. The new version of the opera, moreover, would “soon be the envy of foreign lands, like the ever-fresh *Prodaná nevěsta*.”³¹

Knittl’s *Světobzor* review adumbrates many of the central issues at play in the story of Novotný’s revisions to *Dvě vdovy*. He explicitly tied it to the recent

27 Emanuel Chvála, “Zpěvohra,” *Národní politika* 11, no. 104 (April 15, 1893): 4: “[...] s náležitou pietou ku nezměrně cenné partituře mistrově, jejíž umělecké požadavky předem považoval za nedotknutelné.”

28 Ibid.: “ději [...] vnučeny byly vesnické scény lidové.”

29 Ibid.: “Potřeba upravení textu opery v tom směru, aby hudebně znamenité scény vesnické děj kusu netlačily a nějakým způsobem v něm byly odůvodněny, stala se tím nalahavější, že “Dvě vdovy” ani v přepracování Smetanově nenalezly tolik přízně, aby se byly mohly trvale udržeti na repertoíru.”

30 Karel Knittl, “Opera. Nová úprava zpěvohry *Dvě vdovy* od B. Smetany,” *Světobzor* 27, no. 23 (April 21, 1893): 275: “Nešlo zde sice o zachránění života zpěvohře Smetanově, ta svou hodnotou, svou lahodou a svérázností žila v srdcích všeho pokrokumilovného hudebnictva českého: ale ona nežila pro veliký svět, pro široké vrstvy obecnstva.”

31 Ibid.: “[...] květ, který nám v brzku cizina tak záviděti bude, jako věčně svěží Prodanou nevěstu.”

success of *Prodaná nevěsta* and that opera's new international profile; for Knittl, Novotný's revision would undoubtedly lead to the same fame for *Dvě vdovy* outside the Czech lands in addition to granting the opera a permanent place in the National Theater's repertory. Novotný's appeals to the village mode formed a central part in this recasting, as was evident in his own writings and those of other critics. Knittl's review, moreover, set the stage for the backlash against Novotný's revision and the terms along which the production would be criticized. One line of criticism accused Novotný of "dumbing down" the opera so that it would appeal to a wider audience instead of just trained musicians. Novotný's relaxed attitude toward the text of the work also contradicted the now almost axiomatic veneration of Smetana, which had as its corollary a view of his works as sacrosanct and inviolable. It is characteristic of Western music historiography's emphasis on composers as primary creative figures that Züngel was largely sidelined in discussions about the appropriateness of Novotný's changes. The negative reviews and eventual downfall of his revisions illuminate the process of canonization of Smetana and his operas in the Czech lands, which was in turn intimately bound up with his post-Vienna rise in popularity.

Such concerns were already latent in many of the 1893 reviews of Novotný's version of *Dvě vdovy*, especially when they referred to the purity of Smetana's music. Josef Bohuslav Foerster, a music critic and composer perhaps most well-known for his village opera *Eva* (1899), was more ambivalent than most about the need for the new revisions. On the whole, Foerster approved of Novotný's attempts to fix what the former saw as dramatic insufficiencies in the opera's libretto, especially through the staging of the subsidiary plot in the second act and the concentration of the village-mode elements there. However, Foerster termed three elements of the new production "alarming" ("povážlivý"). First, Novotný's sweeping reordering of the numbers throughout the opera disrupted the flow of the music as created by Smetana, and especially its key relationships and motivic interplay. Second, Foerster objected to the cutting of the Mumlal/Ladislav duet and the use of its music for the prelude to the second act.

Finally, Foerster took issue with the change of text in the final chorus of Novotný's second act because it eliminated the original connection between text and music, which "with a composer of Smetana's character [...] was all the more daring."³² In the 1878 revision, part of the passage in question reads "Musí nás mít, musí nás mít / pán Bůh rád / že nás živí, že nás živí / dosavád!" Novotný changed this so it referred to the action of his second act instead of broadcasting general rejoicing: "Hubičky jsou sladké, svěží / jako med! / Tanec se nám, jak náleží, / dobře zved!" While the music is completely unchanged, Foerster did have a point here, if a relatively minor one. Smetana's text setting accurately

32 Josef Bohuslav Foerster, "Hudba. Dvě vdovy," *Národní listy* 33, no. 104 (April 15, 1893): 4
 "[...] u skladatele rázu Smetanova [...] jest tím odvážnější."

followed the pattern of accents in the Czech, but Novotný makes a mistake: he sets the word “náleží” so that the metrical accent falls on the syllable “-le-” instead of the correct “ná-” (figure 18). Foerster’s criticisms proved prescient, even though he would later largely retract them. Though Novotný had made no changes to Smetana’s actual notes, commentators found ways to show that he had gone too far interfering with the music, whether through upsetting larger key relationships or text-music interactions.



Figure 18: Novotný’s rewritten text for the act 2 finale of his version of *Dvě vdovy*³³

Whatever critics thought of Novotný’s revisions, audiences seemed to like the new production, and while not as popular as *Prodaná nevěsta* or *Cavalleria rusticana*, it was performed twenty-four times between its premiere on April 13, 1893, and 1899. Thereafter, however, major changes began to be made to the production that unraveled Novotný’s work. The ever-increasing veneration of Smetana ultimately spelled the doom of Novotný’s revisions, whatever the popularity of the village elements he had added or the apparent success of his dramaturgical revisions. Musicologist and critic Otakar Hostinský launched the

33 Bedřich Smetana, *Dvě vdovy. Komická opera o třech jednáních*, 1893. Manuscript piano-vocal prompter’s score, inventory number H 6/22, Prague, Archive of the Národní divadlo.

first explicit salvo against Novotný in the journal *Lumír* in September 1893. In a long footnote to an article primarily about the performance history of Smetana's operas written in connection with the then-ongoing Smetana cycle, Hostinský stated that, despite all the good intentions of the National Theater in attempting to rehabilitate *Dvě vdovy*, he was firmly opposed to the new production.

For Hostinský, the integrity of Smetana's music was paramount; the musicologist would not have objected, he said, to the more thorough adjustments and corrections to the libretto, especially the use of spoken dialogue, but the actual score would have had to remain untouched. He thus objected strongly to the reordering of the entire opera, calling it a "far too daring experiment."³⁴ He again pointed to the inviolability of the overall musical structure, calling Smetana "an excellent artist with a clear sense for musical architecture."³⁵ The best solution, Hostinský concluded, was to let the composer's original version stand on its own. Such a position indicted Novotný on the counts of interfering with Smetana's music and of disregarding the composer's genius in creating overarching tonal relationships.

Rather than regard *Dvě vdovy* as a living theatrical piece, as Novotný had done in his attempt to make it more palatable to contemporary audiences, Hostinský advocated a view of composers and musical works as sacred or museum-piece objects, which aided his larger project of establishing Smetana as the founding father of modern Czech music in the broader narrative of Czech music history.³⁶ Ironically, both Novotný and Hostinský held up Smetana as an exemplary artist and implicitly agreed that his operas could be used to project a vision of Czech character domestically and abroad. Novotný turned to the village mode in an attempt to make *Dvě vdovy* even more effective in this role, while for Hostinský—and, slightly later, Zdeněk Nejedlý—Smetana's music was always already perfectly suited to the job.

Nejedlý's criticisms of the Novotný version, which were published in 1908, held to the same models as some earlier commentators. Novotný's decision to reorder the numbers, eliminate recitative, and change texts meant that, even though he had not written a single new note, he had nevertheless interfered with Smetana's music. "If Smetana's original has a weak text but Smetana's masterful musical style," Nejedlý wrote, "then the revision still has a weak text and no musical style. Smetana rescues even the weakest libretto precisely through his

34 Otakar Hostinský, "Něco o osudech zpěvoher Smetanových," *Lumír* 21, no. 27 (September 20, 1893): 323: "[...] zdá se mi býti [...] příliš odvážným pokusem [...]"

35 Ibid.: "[...] vůči umělci jemným smyslem pro hudební architektoniku vynikajícímu [...]"

36 In this Hostinský's ideas accord quite closely with similar trends in the rest of Europe towards canonization and the preservation of repertoire pieces. See, for example, William Gibbons, *Building the Operatic Museum: Eighteenth-Century Opera in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 1–7.

style [...].”³⁷ Nejedlý’s long analysis of the opera seems designed to refute each of Novotný’s various premises for particular revisions. In almost every instance, the crux of the former’s argument was that Smetana was such a genius that any change—whether getting rid of recitatives, changing the position of Anežka’s big aria, or more deeply characterizing Toník and Lidunka—would inevitably interrupt the dramatic, musical, and poetic foundations of the opera.

It is thus no surprise that Nejedlý disdained Novotný’s decision to move all the choruses and “folk” scenes into a new second act. Yet despite his reservations, Nejedlý was just as enthusiastic as other commentators when it came to the effectiveness of these scenes vis-à-vis the village mode: in the case of the chorus “Jitro krásné,” he stated, “this whole scene smells directly of the countryside and its hues, drenched in sunshine.”³⁸ While he held that the choruses were not a “narrative factor” (“dějový činitel”) in *Dvě vdovy* as they had been in *Prodaná nevěsta*, he maintained that “the scenes of the underlying plot play out in a countryside chateau, the whole mood of the countryside is here only a background for the plot as such; Smetana, however, knew superbly how to take full advantage of this background.”³⁹ The rural setting was an important part of *Dvě vdovy* for Nejedlý as well as Novotný, but they differed in how it should be expressed in this particular opera.

Novotný and the National Theater Association felt the need to revise Smetana both in order to ensure the success of all his operas both abroad and at home. Novotný streamlined the action of *Dvě vdovy* by drawing on the village mode that had been so successful in *Prodaná nevěsta*. For Hostinský and Nejedlý there was no need to do this because, in their eyes, Smetana was already enough of a sacralized composer-genius to obviate updating. In this respect, Novotný, Chvála, and others like them represented an older view of Czech music and its place in Europe, while Nejedlý and Hostinský brought the conversation more in line with discourses of composer glorification and music-historical narrativization happening in the rest of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is evident in Nejedlý’s key pronouncement regarding the value of Smetana’s salon opera: “In *Dvě vdovy* Smetana is *the creator of the modern salon comedy*, and not just a Czech one. No musical literature yet has such a comedy from the present day as we have in this opera of Smetana.”⁴⁰ If

37 Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Zpěvohry Smetanovy* (Prague: J. Otto, 1908), 188: “Má-li Smetanův originál slabý text, ale mistrovský hudební sloh Smetanův, má úprava text sice také slabý, ale při tom žádný hudební sloh. Smetana právě svým slohem zachraňuje i nejslabší libretto [...]”

38 Ibid., 203: “[...] celá ta scéna přímo voní venkovem a jeho barvami, sluncem prozářenými.”

39 Ibid., 202: “Scény vlastního děje odehrávají se na venkovském zámku, celá nálada venkova jest tu jen pozadí pro celý děj; Smetana však dovedl nálady tohoto prozadí znamenitě využítkovati.”

40 Ibid., 191 (emphasis in original): “Smetana jest ve ‘Dvou vdovách’ *tvůrce moderní salonní veselohry*, a to nejenom české. Žádná hudební literatura nemá dosud takové veselohry ze současné doby jako máme my v této Smetanově zpěvohře.”

this was indeed the case, the logic of musical heroism and operatic canonization would dictate a return to Smetana's final version to allow the opera to take its place at the vanguard of European music. And indeed, Smetana's 1878 version of *Dvě vdovy* returned to the stage of the National Theater in 1923, under the baton of Otakar Ostrčil, who, as chief conductor, enjoyed Nejedlý's support and shared some of his aesthetic views.⁴¹

To conclude, the history of *Dvě vdovy* reflects the changing appreciations of Czech opera in Prague. The ascendancy of the rural as one of the defining aspects of Czech comic opera brought *Dvě vdovy* success both during Smetana's lifetime, with his deliberately national additions of 1878, and in the aftermath of Vienna in 1892, when the popularity of the Czech village was confirmed by its success with international audiences. Novotný relied on his theatrical experience and familiarity with Prague's musical culture to fashion a version of Smetana's opera that, through the village mode, would be more dramatically coherent and appeal more to a specific sense of Czech identity grounded in ruralness and, as a result, be more appealing to audiences. His use of tried-and-true revision strategies already employed by artists in other European capitals, reveals the resonances of both local and imperial discourses; at the same time, however, these strategies were popular much earlier in the nineteenth century, which may have been in part what doomed Novotný's efforts.

This reception history also allows us to trace the progress of the consecration of Smetana and his works, from the composer's lowest point in 1874 to his ascension to the status of unimpeachable artistic hero-genius in the early twentieth century. Novotný's *Dvě vdovy* stands as a testament to the public veneration of the composer, especially in the wake of Vienna, as all commentators agreed that Smetana's operas should be performed for the public. Novotný initially felt that it was necessary to update *Dvě vdovy* almost as a pious act toward the composer, as a way of ensuring his legacy for future generations. That others would then denigrate Novotný's efforts testifies both to changing appreciations of the integrity of operatic works and Smetana's increasingly sacrosanct status.

Finally, this study of *Dvě vdovy* also reveals some of the ways in which Czech opera was not an isolated cultural phenomenon, but a repertoire that was influenced by trends in a larger European context. The question of cosmopolitan participation versus nationalist isolationism in Czech opera became a highly fraught one for the remainder of the Habsburg Empire and well into the lifespan

41 For more on the relationship between Ostrčil and Nejedlý around this time, see Brian S. Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague. Polemics and Practice at the National Theater. 1900–1938* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 146–150 and 187–190.

of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Such questions—of artworks' political relevance, of composers' roles as symbols, and of broader European cultural exchange—continue to resonate into the present, and the histories we tell about figures like Smetana give us insight into these issues.

The Devils of Litomyšl*

There are many devils in Czech culture; you can find them everywhere: in fairy tales like “Hrátky s Čertem,” (“Plays with the Devil”) and on those percussive *vozembouchs*. They are present in proverbs and sayings like “Jdi k čertu” (“Go to the Devil”) and “Čert nikdy nespí,” (“Devil never sleeps”) and of course the devil comes around during Christmas and St. Nicholas Day. You see them by the thousands in shops where hundreds of different kinds of devils are available as part of the puppet culture. And the puppet culture reveals that *the devil takes many shapes*: devils can be sinister, but they can also be funny; they can be tall or very short; they can come in pairs, and even husband and wife teams; they can be cute and even absurd. Devils are even present at the birth of Jesus, at least in the famous Králíky figures. You can eat a “Ďábelská směs” (“Devilish mix”) and visit pubs with names like “Čertovka.”¹

There are also devils all throughout Czech music, from Otakar Ostrčil’s *Honzovo království* (*Jack’s Kingdom*) to Erwin Schulhoff’s *Suite for Violin and Piano*, and in operas such as Antonín Dvořák’s *Čert a Káča* (*Devil and Kate*), Bohuslav Martinů’s *Hry o Marii* (*Plays of Mary*), Jaromír Weinberger’s *Švanda dudák* (*Švanda the Bagpiper*), in operettas like Karel Moor’s *Pan professor v pekle* (*The Professor in Hell*), and of course, Leoš Janáček’s play-within-a-play in *Z mrtvého domu* (*From the House of the Dead*). Janáček even had a dog named Čert.

There are many devils in Czech culture, but there are also many devils specifically in Litomyšl, and they will be the subject of this chapter. Some devils

* I would like to thank Aleš Březina and Ivana Rentsch for inviting me to the International Smetana Conference in Litomyšl, June 2023; Tina Frühauf for sending me her recently published article “The Dialectics of Nationalism: Jaromír Weinberger’s *Schwanda the Bagpiper* and Anti-Semitism in Interwar Europe,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 35, no. 1 (March 2023): 50–74; Pavel Kodýtek for assistance in getting ahold of various early issues of *Rudé právo*, and the art historian, Marie Rakušanová for her enriching response to my work on Váchal.

1 Two publications that were useful in this area: Albert Gier, “Der Teufel in der Oper. Zum motivgeschichtlichen Umfeld von Čertova stěna,” *Musicologica Olomucensia* 27 (June 2018): 118–130; and William Connor, “Constructing the Sound of Devils: Dialectical Interactions between Culture, History, and the Construction of the Czech *Vozembouch*,” *Živá hudba* 8 (2017): 12–41.

were placed there, some were created there, and some were born there, and we shall get to all of them.

The devil, then, takes many shapes, and perhaps, depending on your historical sense and your politics, the statue standing at the corner of Zámecká and Prkenná streets in Litomyšl might be one of them: Zdeněk Nejedlý. Some might think it much too strong to consider Zdeněk Nejedlý a devil, especially in light of revisionist approaches such as those by Jiří Křestan² and Petr Čornej,³ although the inscription under the statue seems to acknowledge something of the sort: “He both enriched and corrupted Czech culture. He brought honor and shame to his hometown, which values his good deeds while rejecting his bad ones” (“Rozmnožil i poškodil kulturu českou. Přinesl poctu i úhonu rodnému městu, jež oceňuje dobré a zavrhuje špatné jeho skutky”). Honor and shame! High and low! Nejedlý is not the only devil in Litomyšl to trade in such categories. Witness another evil genius of a sort, Josef Váchal (1884–1969), whose astonishing *Portmoneum* is mere steps from Nejedlý’s statue.⁴ The *Portmoneum* is simply a world-class artifact, a wonder of the world, one of the great combinations of house, artwork and museum anywhere. Painted by Váchal over several years starting in 1920 at the request of the bibliophile and publisher Josef Portman, the result is astonishing (figure 19).⁵

As noted by art historian Marie Rakušanová, Váchal’s concept of *Portmoneum* was somewhat conceptual and ironical. He conceived it as a theatrical stage and the very name, *Portmoneum*, was meant to be an ironic comment on Portman’s obsession.

Váchal was a gifted landscape painter, which is obvious if one leafs through the largest book ever printed in Czechoslovakia, *Šumava umírající a romantická* (*The Bohemian Forest, Dying and Romantic*), and the *Portmoneum* features gorgeous landscapes as well. But it is also a study in contrasts: for example, a lovely rendering of the Virgin Mary sits above two (rather cute) devils.

2 Jiří Křestan, *Zdeněk Nejedlý. Politik a vědec v osamění* (Prague and Litomyšl: Paseka, 2012).

3 Petr Čornej, *Historici, historiografie a dějepis: Studie, črty, eseje* (Prague: Karolinum, 2016).

4 Here I remember my wonderful friend, Jiří Čtrnáct, who first took me to *Portmoneum* more than thirty years ago. He was a deeply committed artistic soul, and altogether original—he started his career as a student of French literature. When the Russians invaded, he became an expert in sheep shearing, and ended up as the Vice-Major of Polička where his job included managing the Svojanov Castle. I think of him whenever I end up at the *Portmoneum*.

5 For my work on Váchal I am indebted to Marie Rakušanová, especially the following publications: Marie Rakušanová, *Josef Váchal. Magie hledání* (Prague and Litomyšl: Paseka, 2014); Marie Rakušanová, “Josef Váchal: Umstürzler, Handwerker und Magier über die Kunst,” *Umění* 60, no. 6 (2012), 478–508; Marie Rakušanová, *Josef Váchal: napsal, vyryl, vytiskl a svázal* (Řevnice: Arbor vitae, 2014).

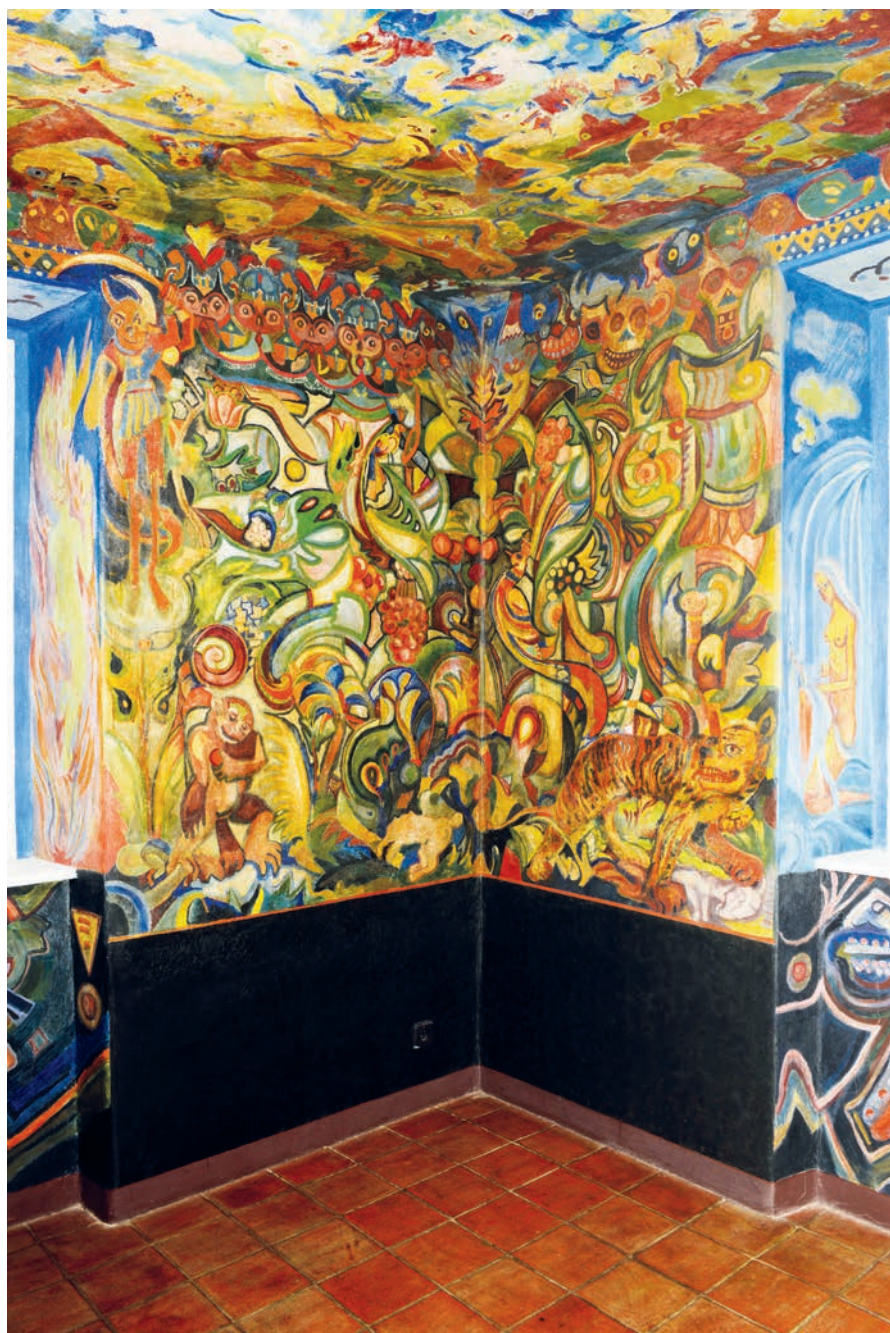


Figure 19: Josef Váchal, *Portmoneum* in Litomyšl (© Marie Rakušanová)

In fact, if one tries to count all the devils in *Portmoneum* one will probably find more than 150. We know the devil is a frequent character in Váchal's arsenal

because Váchal was a well-known Satanist; at one point he even tried to assemble all the names of the Evil One: Lucifer Belial Satan Beelzebub Astaroth Pluto Ariel Mephistophiles Marbuel Amguel Anisel Barfael Abbadon Chamus Milea Lapasis Merapis Milpeza Chinicham Pimpam, etc.

And alas—and I say alas, because he truly is one of my favorite artists—we must acknowledge that part of his deviltry lies with the fact that at a certain point in his life he was a virulent anti-Semite (figure 20).



Figure 20: Josef Váchal, *České exlibris*, ca. 1938 (© Michael Beckerman)

As far as I can tell, this image is only discussed in one book, Jiří Olič's *Neznámý Váchal*.⁶ It is strangely absent from Petr Hruška's voluminous *Josef Váchal: Exlibris a jejích adresáti*.⁷ This *ex libris* probably dates from 1938, although the original plate is not extant so one cannot be completely sure (my personal copy says 1941). The *ex libris* itself is disturbing enough, as much because unlike any other *ex libris* it was not done on commission, but rather for Váchal himself. Various figures depict Germany (a musclebound Aryan with a swastika and a bolt of lightning); "New Europe," which appears as an impassive Minerva; a caricature Jew in the upper right is about to be struck by Nazi lightning; and in the lower right center, the Homeland is either beseeching or mustering half of a Nazi salute. In the middle, the Intellectual lies prostrate, perhaps drunk; out of his mouth seem to come Jewish figures, suggesting that Jews are speaking through him, evoking ancient conspiracy theories. At least one commentator believes that the triangular arrangement of the "Czech" figures is meant to evoke the Western border of the country.

In his left hand, the Intellectual holds a mysterious object, perhaps the image of a Masonic square, and there is a Golden Calf, with both historical and moral-ethical symbolic weight. On the lower fringes to the right, weird devils or demons, one of them in a kind of cowboy hat, perform a lascivious dance, and, if I am not mistaken, one of them reaches into the Homeland's dress with something hideous and snakelike. One might suggest that overinterpreting this image risks attributing views to Váchal that he might or might not have had, and that without nuance we cannot speak with authority about Váchal's beliefs. After all, who can say what art means? But Váchal's own diaries and writings of the time tell a pretty clear story: on March 7, 1939, only one week before the Nazi invasion he writes, "O Czechia, seduced by the Jews and now getting better!"⁸ From his letters and other comments it appears that Váchal believed that the British and the Americans were the aggressors in the war. In his diary he writes, "I admire Hitler's just and beautiful speech" and refers to "Göring's beautiful speech,"⁹ and in a letter to his friend Karel Němec on June 5, 1940, he writes, "Heil Sieg! Glory to the Great German leader. Woe to the Czech serpents dominating the last two decades just like the degenerate serpents France and England."¹⁰ He signed several letters during the time with swastikas, alienating some of his best friends and ardent supporters.¹¹

Váchal did create two subsequent swastika *ex libris*, which possibly could

6 Jiří Olič, *Neznámý Váchal. Život umělce* (Prague and Litomyšl: Paseka, 2000), 180–183.

7 Petr Hruška, *Josef Váchal: Exlibris a jejích adresáti* (Prague: Jan Placák, 2016).

8 Olič, *Neznámý Váchal*, 184.

9 Ibid., 186.

10 Ibid., 189.

11 Ibid., 193.

be construed as twisted apologies, depending on your point of view. The first, probably from 1946, depicts a weird female Vodník killing a soldier while a red Hitler devil cheers, a possible indictment of the Nazis (figure 21). A second one shows Hitler as a bloodthirsty collector of skeletons—an indictment perhaps—but the presence of what looks like a Jew in a Bolshevik cap might lend something else to the scene (figure 22).



Figure 21: Josef Váchal, *Exlibris*, ca. 1946 (© Michael Beckerman)



Figure 22: Josef Váchal, *Exlibris*, ca. 1946 (© Michael Beckerman)

Váchal's antisemitism and his Satanism bring us to a confluence between a subject that has been well-researched, one might say exhaustively so: the relationship between the Jew and the devil. Many articles and monographs trace ideas of the Jews as the children of Satan, and in their behavior and appearance they have often been considered a literal manifestation of the devil, with horns and an animal foot. Some of this probably dates to problems of biblical translation where the Hebrew word “karan” (shining or emitting light) is conflated with “keren” (horn), which famously explains why Michelangelo’s *Moses*, instead of having a halo like an angel has horns like a devil; but that alone cannot account

for the phenomenon. While it would never be my intention to suggest that antisemitism alone explains the construction of devil marionettes or other visual versions of the devil, this legacy remains.

At least some part of Nejedlý's decidedly mixed legacy, as is obvious from the statue inscription, is his own relationship to the Jews. As an ardent anti-Fascist, he was somewhat sympathetic to the Jews as victims of Nazism directly after the war, but his behavior during the antisemitic Slánský trials was disgraceful, even considering recent arguments that he simply did what he did because he was terrified. And twenty-five years earlier, we may note Nejedlý's over-the-top, vicious review in *Rudé právo* of Weinberger's *Švanda dudák*, where he used every caricature of the Jew as blasphemer and cosmopolitan poseur, while simultaneously stating, "Is it not a punishment directly from God that this unique 'national' and 'patriotic' work was composed for our anti-Semitic fascists—by a Jew?"¹² In Brian Locke's words, "that Nejedlý could refute one antisemitic argument with another (albeit an indirect one) reveals the latent distrust for all those outside an imagined 'ethnically Czech' category."¹³ I will return to this notion of the "Czech category" at the end of this chapter.

The devil also has many walls, some are in Germany and others in Macedonia... some are in Austria and still others are in Italy, and some, of course, are in the Czech Lands. And this brings us to the last of our three devils. There is, of course, nothing overtly or covertly antisemitic in Smetana's *Čertova stěna* (*The Devil's Wall*). Rarach is no Jew, and Smetana, unlike the other two protagonists, Nejedlý and Váchal, is not the devil in any case, but rather the ingenious creator of musical devilry. Smetana was not an antisemite. After all, it was a member of the Jewish community, Isaac Philip Valentin, who invited Smetana to Gothenburg, and one of the most important relationships of Smetana's early life was with Fröjda Benecke, born Frojda Gumpert, also a Swedish Jew and niece of Smetana's friend Anschel Moses Nissen. Smetana seems to have been involved with many members of the Jewish community, especially through Joseph Czapek, himself a Catholic, who was the organist in the Gothenburg synagogue.

In my discussion of Smetana in what follows, however, I do suggest some connection between the mutability of devils, Smetana's depiction of them, and certain aspects of a putative "Czech style." One of the ways in which Smetana's devil is distinguished musically is by "too much" alternation and change, but this also symbolizes something aesthetically profound, simultaneously modernist and in keeping with some characteristics I have associated with "Czechness" over the years. Act 3, scene 6 begins with the following stage instructions:

12 *Rudé Právo*, May 1, 1927, p.11.

13 Brian S. Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague. Polemics and Practice at the National Theater 1900–1938* (Eastman Studies in Music, 39) (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 203.

“Rarach sits down at the Devil’s chancel and plays the pipes; instead of sheep, little devils jump out of the rocks and perform an infernal dance on and around the boulders.” There is one aspect of musical modernism that has its antecedents in special programmatic effects: the dissonant strangeness of both Rebel’s and Haydn’s representations of Chaos, the hysterical “development section” which comprises Beethoven’s “Pastoral” storm, weird demonic scales in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* overture, Berlioz’ decapitated head pizzicato, and Biber’s incoherent drunken quodlibet. Smetana’s Devil dance doubles down on disjunction. But, both because music acts on us the way it does, and because of the choices Smetana makes, this devil dance is—like a collection of devil puppets—simultaneously charming and scary, sweet and nasty, high and low.

You can get a sense of this by looking at the successive tempo markings of the dance sequence: Quasi presto – Moderato assai – Quasi presto – Poco allargando – Allegro molto – Piu Vivo – Vivo – Meno Mosso – Molto Vivo – Con fuoco. While tempo changes in opera are not uncommon, tempo changes during a relatively short *dance* sequence of not more than three minutes are decidedly unusual. The music also features everything ranging from maximum disjunction and dissociation associated with the chaos of hell (example 12).

Example 12: Bedřich Smetana, *Čertova stěna*, act 3, scene 6: Beginning of the “hellish dance” (“pekelný tanec”)

As with any chaotic system, we may note how order periodically reasserts itself, with gorgeous moments of pastoral or waltz appearing now and then.

It has been thirty years since my eminent colleague and friend Jarmila Gabrielová wrote to me that “we’re not interested in things like Czechness anymore,” so it seems ill-mannered to keep returning to it, but this devilish dance could stand as a symbol of a certain kind of “Czechness,” for years ago I argued that one possible characteristic of a possible Czech style is the artful yet unpretentious combination of unlike elements: gentle Christmas pastorals and Hussite aggression, town and country, bagpipes and church hymns, Brahms and Papageno, combining the modern and the archaic, and drawing on tunes from Sweden, Slovakia, Roma, and the United States over the centuries (actually, the very stylistic combinations Nejedlý invoked to accuse Weinberger of musical fascism in his review).

Even if this concatenation of unlike elements we find in the devil’s dance is something like “Czechness” on steroids, it is not clear that the devil himself can ever really be Czech; he is always Other, he is not part of the community. And with this we come back to Brian Locke’s notion about what he called “distrust for all those outside an imagined ‘ethnically Czech’ category.” Again, despite several revisionist efforts, we need some distance and protection from people like Nejedlý, who use composers like Smetana to amass power and advance their own ideological agendas about Czechness—with an emphasis on who belongs and who does not—like those who persecuted the composer Jan Novák in the early 1950s because they said his polka was not sufficiently Czech.¹⁴ Perhaps it may even come to pass that the Czech language will develop a word for those who are fully members of the Czech community, who live here and are part of the culture, but can now only be identified through a hyphen: “Czech-Jewish,” or “Czech-Roma,” or “Czech-Vietnamese.” For example, while I could switch my football fan allegiance from AC Sparta to Zbrojovka Brno, convert to Christianity, or change gender, no matter how many years I lived in the Czech Republic, it is not clear that I could ever become fully Czech, at least not according to the language, which plays a not insignificant role in determining reality. “On je Čech,” refers to ethnicity, not nationality. (An example of this can be found in a recent book supposedly devoted entirely to “Czech musicologists,” where the eminent Dvořák scholar David Beveridge was absent despite the fact that he is one of the leading world researchers on Czech music and has lived in the country for decades.)

14 See Martin Flašar and Pavel Zůrek, *Umělec nesmí nikdy ztratit odvahu. Jan Novák a Bohuslav Martinů ve světle korespondence (1947–1959)* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2021), 122–123. The main protagonists here are Emanuel Kuksa and Ludvík Poděšť.

There are devils everywhere in Czech culture, and as noted, there are devils of all conceivable sizes and types (figure 23).



Figure 23: Devils in a Puppet Store, Malá Strana, Prague (© Michael Beckerman)

Making a convincing and scholarly argument that Czech devils, musical and otherwise, differ from devils in other places in Europe will have to await further research, though I believe it to be the case. To return to our devils here in Litomyšl, I believe that all three of the figures discussed here deserve to be called extraordinary thinkers and creators, and certainly, all of them made important contributions and created works that are worthy of study. I have argued that two of them were devils of a sort due to their behavior and their views, and all those who admire or love their work have to come to terms with such a reality, whatever that may mean. That Smetana is the only one of the three who is no devil, and who has been able to traverse the path from Litomyšl to the world

stage, may just be a coincidence. No matter what, Smetana was able to create one of the world's great devils in Rarach, and provide him with a special dance that, like so much of Smetana's best work, brings together the center and periphery, the local and the universal, and in doing so achieves a transcendent stature.

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